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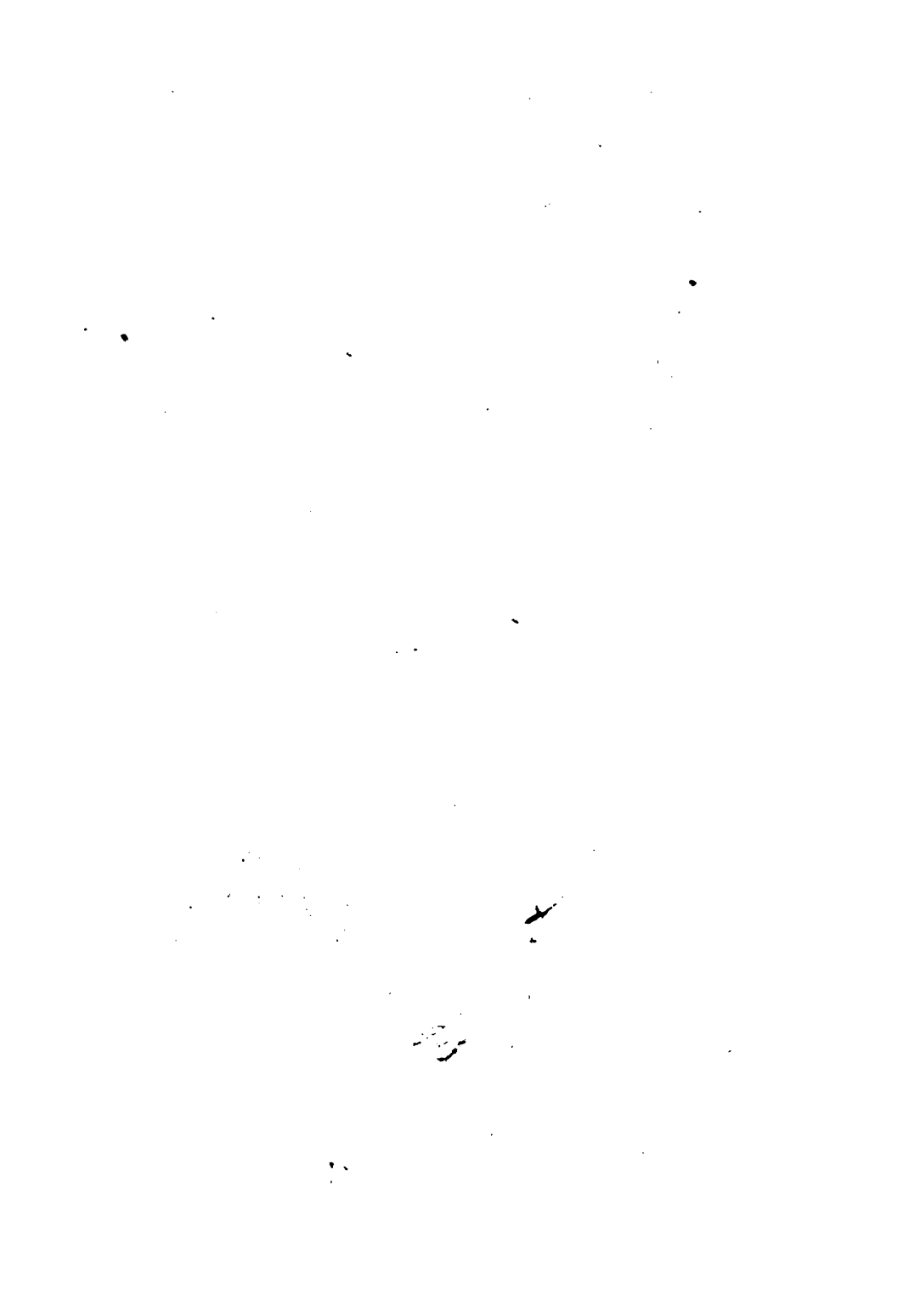
IN HER MAJESTY'S
KEEPING

HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD.



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IN HER MAJESTY'S KEEPING.

The Story of a Hidden Life.

BY
THE HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD,
AUTHOR OF
'LADY GRIZEL,' 'MY LORDS OF STROGUE,' ETC.

'Recompense Injury with Justice, and Kindness with Kindness.'
CONFUCIUS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.



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PART I.

THE VICTIM SPEAKS.



IN HER MAJESTY'S KEEPING.



CHAPTER I.

WHAT WAS IT ?



REAT Heaven ! was I awake or dreaming ? As, half-roused from lethargy, I gazed with stupid amazement at the unfamiliar surroundings ; listened to the hushed talk and creaking to and fro of men in tight blue uniforms ; observed that all eyes were turned from time to time on me ; I felt that I must be still under the influence of some frightful nightmare. The choking sensation would pass by-and-by and I should wake with a sigh of relieved thankfulness to note the familiar roses on the

wall paper of my bed-chamber, and rolling on comfortable pillows to weave subtle luxurious plans for wringing every possible enjoyment out of the succeeding hours of sunshine.

My darling little Mildred—apple of my eye—would come dancing in presently like some elfish fay crowned with a golden tangle, a steaming cup of tea poised in the wee hands that could scarcely support the burthen, to wish papa good-morning. Then, sitting beside him on the bed, she would repeat some childish poem with grave blue eyes and babbling lips, and receiving a kiss as guerdon for the treat, would imperatively demand, with the imperial airs of a little queen, a share in the day's pleasure. Bless her bonny sunny hair! Why did the truant tarry? Did she not know how her father doted on her, how his heartstrings were wound round and round her slender form? What plans of pleasure could he form in which her interests were not certain to be paramount? She must have overslept herself, the naughty fairy, and should be well scolded when she deigned to come, for papa was suffering from bad dreams, his head was

addled, and there was a weight upon his chest, from which it behoved her to free him by her presence.

What a terrible nightmare! Often and often had I suffered from such before, though none so bad as this, after a late supper-party, or some gay carousal with a band of convivial fellows; and when I woke from gruesome visions with a dry tongue and throbbing head to discover that I was not falling through the air from a house-top, or rattling down the side of a crevasse, I was so glad to find myself snugly ensconced in my own house at Hampstead, that I could afford to listen with complacency to my wife's eternal jeremiads, wherein she was wont to inform me with shrill upbraidings that my tendency to take a drop too much would certainly prove my ruin.

I was suffocating! Was this an apoplectic seizure? I rubbed my eyes till they fairly smarted—with such singularly grimy fingers. But the roses on the wall-paper appeared not, neither did my elfish darling trip in to solace me. Could this indeed be reality which I looked upon? Oh no! A cold

shudder, like the paroxysm of an ague-fit, shook me from head to foot. The unfamiliar room with its whitewashed walls was real. The plain deal settles, polished by years of friction, felt solid to the touch of my soiled hand. The groups of men in uniform were real; so were the people who stared at me in knots with frightened eyes and craning necks.

It was clear that this was not a dream. What could have happened and where was I? From the low surrounding hum I could learn nothing; I remembered nothing, but only knew that my temples throbbed and that my tongue was rough, and that a vague suspicion was creeping over me that there must be something wrong. Looking in a dazed way out of a barred window, beyond the groups of people in the outer hall, I beheld a street that I had never seen before, flecked by dazzling sunlight and sharp shadows which told my practised eye that it was midday. There were men and women moving briskly along this unknown street; an omnibus passed which was not a London omnibus; a private carriage; a cab of

peculiar build. The bars of that window smote as an omen on my heart. They stood twixt me and daylight—twixt me and liberty. They told my whirling brain in mysterious whispers that I had done with sunlight and with liberty for ever ; with cabs and omnibuses and the traffic of busy streets ; that a crushing blow had fallen on my head whose scar I was to wear unto the END.

I raised my hands to my dizzy brow and strove to think ; and at the movement the men in blue turned with one accord towards me, as though they were in some sort responsible for what I did. For a time I sought in vain to conjure up the past. Everything was vague, confused, spinning up and down and round and round ; but by degrees, by dint of heavy plodding perseverance, I remembered a quarrel with my wife—but that was nothing new ; I was always quarrelling with my wife ; for my temper was short and hot, while she was querulous and complaining. I remembered being so much annoyed by her that I threw down my brushes and palette in a huff, and banged out of the studio, leaving my Academy picture

to paint itself. Then I remember thinking, as I strode into the air, that I had oceans of time, for was it not June, and had I not well nigh a year before me? What was the use of slaving on with this woman dinning her complaints into my ears? I would take a week's holiday, all by myself, I thought. Yes! Here was a flood of light! Here was a clue to what had taken place. My temper had been fretted beyond bearing, for though an Englishman, I have Spanish blood flowing in my veins, which will assert its influence sometimes in spite of all that I can do. This woman might goad me on to striking her in my present exasperated condition, and an assault by a husband on a wife of gentle birth builds a wall between them which may never be overpassed.

I had often contemplated leaving her, going away where she would never find me, where her waspish tongue could never reach me, but I had always given up the project; for what was to become of my golden-haired Mildred if her father were to leave her mother? Could I carry her away with me? Hardly. I had not the courage

to tear from a mother's arms an only child. She might die under the loss ; and yet, why should she ? I loved my darling so that I felt were I, her father, to lose her, I myself must die ; but with her mother it was otherwise. She was harsh and stern, though she said she loved the child. Well, well ! if she did—and surely she could not be so inhuman as not to love her own offspring—she had a strange way of showing her affection. Perhaps in her way she loved me too ! At any rate her existence was a lesson to me as far as evil temper went. I tried hard always to control my feelings for my little Mildred's sake. But in spite of all I could do I was so annoyed, so harassed, and so worried now, that I determined to depart for a week alone, to seek peace by communing with nature, to gain strength of purpose from the trees, the flowers, the sea, and then return quietly to work. So on the morning of that quarrel I flung down my palette and brushes, gave Mildred a parting hug, and sallied with a swift step out into the streets of Hampstead, where we dwelt, in the ancient red brick square hard by the crumbling church, re-

solved to look upon my home no more till my anger was appeased and my mind soothed.

Yes, that was it. I saw it all. I recalled how, as I strolled across Belsize Park, I considered that it would be well to administer a sharp lesson to that woman with the shrewish tongue. I would play her a trick and frighten her ; leave without warning ; go sketching somewhere ; not even write to say whither I had gone. I was glad to have given my pet that tender embrace at parting, for I did not dare return to the house even to pack up some clothes, lest my wife should smell a rat and begin another scene which might infuriate me beyond power of control. How much money had I in my pocket ? Some loose silver and a cheque for fifty pounds received not an hour since in payment for two drawings. This was most lucky ! I would get the cheque cashed ; purchase a hand-bag and half-a-dozen shirts. My velvet jacket was worn at the seams—it was my studio jacket—but it might pass muster. It was a pity I had not changed my shirt. Artists are careless folk and apt

to be slovenly of a morning, only attiring themselves in fashionable gear when the day's labour is completed. No matter, I could put on a clean shirt at the hosier's, and bid him keep the soiled one for me till I called for it.

Whither should I go for my week's holiday? I am an energetic man who abhors idleness in himself as well as others. I do not care much for desultory sketching. Studies are all very well if they are saleable or if they can be worked into a picture, but otherwise they are tiresome labour. My new academy picture, just commenced, was to represent John Knox preaching to Scotch shepherds. Why should I not go to some town in Scotland off the beaten track, and seek out a background, or branch off at any place which might look promising; obtain here a study or two of rocks for foreground, there perhaps a suggestive effect of sky? An admirable notion. Nothing could be better. I would act on it forthwith. There is nothing more pleasant to a Bohemian mind than to wander, led by chance, in pursuit of a definite object. By slow degrees, as

I probed within, one event after another unveiled itself, as a sun-picture does when chemical action is applied.

I had entered the train with nothing but a hand-bag containing six shirts and a new sketch-book and colour-box. Weary and ruffled in spirit, I had fallen into a deep slumber; had omitted to make a change at a certain junction, had got out at a side-station where there was nothing that would suit John Knox, and had thereupon taken a fly to drive across country to Carlisle, with a new idea of striking northward in the first instance as far as Edinburgh. At Carlisle I discovered that the Flying Scotchman would not pass for many hours, and so turned into the town in search of the picturesque.

Somewhere about this point my memory began to fail. What could have happened after that? I dined at an old fashioned inn, and got into conversation with some gentlemen; though what they were like I could not at all remember. Then a filmy silhouette showed itself indistinctly on my mind's mirror, which looked like a music-hall. I seemed to see a ballet, some indifferent

gymnasts and vulgar comic singers, a multitude of gas jets and overwhelming heat, and a vast concourse of red-faced persons fanning themselves. And after that—nothing! All was a blank. Strive as I would to move the roller, my panorama stood stockstill. But the earnest effort to concentrate my thoughts had done me good. There remained not the smallest shred of doubt that what I saw was no delusion. It was like a *tableau vivant* upon a stage, whereon (behind a veil of crape) living puppets are placed to simulate a story. As an artist I had frequently managed such things in private houses, and surveyed the different groupings now with a critic's eye. It was—or appeared to be—a curious story, which interested me, although in it I had no personal concern, either as manager or actor. And yet, who was that central figure crouching on a form? Great Heaven! how like myself it was! It was I—or else my double—who was sitting on a settle in a strange place, which looked out on one side upon a corridor where idlers were waiting. Policemen were grouped round me—or else my double. They were guarding a wild beast

—a savage animal that required a dozen guardians to keep him within bounds. A desperate animal that, to need so many keepers. Oh God! *That wild beast was I!* What could I have done?

The suspense which threatened to grind my life out of me came to a sudden end. A tall man, with a close-cut beard, who wore a flat blue cap and braided surtout, tapped me on the arm, looking askance the while with an uncertain expression, half-compassionate, half-menacing.

‘You are a police-superintendent!’ I muttered, as in a trance. ‘Whatever can you want with me?’

‘Come!’ he said. ‘The magistrates are in a hurry. This passage will lead you to the dock.’

‘THE DOCK!’ My blood froze up; then, thawing, rushed in choked eddies to my heart. Mechanically I stood upon my feet, and swam rather than walked, guided by the tall official who held me in his grip, till—pushed up a step—I found myself in a small grilled compound, whose gate snapped on me with a clang of steel.

The curtain dropped again on my faculties, and I was only by degrees aware that I was not alone in the large hall, for rising out of the ground (I did not see them come or go) there were three dim rows of shades—some bald, some white-haired—who moved on their seats as fidgetty mortals might, 'twixt me and the day. Occasionally they seemed to yawn and look at their watches, and lean across to whisper something which caused one or two to laugh; and then they blew their noses and took snuff, and cleared their throats—so very like mortals almost out of sight, that I could not but marvel at their cleverness as spectres. For they were not far off—they were close by. Beyond them, a few paces only from the platform where I stood caged, I could see another sunny street, which I knew not, fretted by the bustle of the world. I could see a cab discharging luggage at a hotel door—such a pile of luggage, which I counted piece by piece; and folks greeting one another and shaking hands and doffing hats, then passing on with blithesome step as if they enjoyed the summer—bars between them and me, thick, ponderous bars of

iron—and the conviction weighed me down till I grew drowsy and stupid with its weight, that I had somehow been guilty of some grievous sin, and was to be hustled with all speed beyond reach of the glorious sun.

Somebody rose up and spoke—a long way off—what cunning clever ghosts! I knew that if he were not film I could touch him with an outstretched hand, and yet his voice sounded miles and miles away. And a fresh sensation seemed to come over *me*. Had I grown deaf, or was the furious Atlantic billowing without? I must be deaf, for the speaker was standing so near—so near—and yet I could scarcely hear him.

‘Prisoner!’ I made out with difficulty. ‘Have you ought to say in palliation of your conduct? The charge is very grave, and you will be committed for trial. Be very careful. I would advise you to reserve your defence. It is my duty to remind you, prisoner, that anything you may choose to state may come to be used against you at your trial.’

‘*My trial!*’ Then I was not wrong in supposing that I had done something—

what? If only I could remember what had passed. Could I, seduced by pleasant company at the old-fashioned inn, and worried and harassed by home-troubles — have sought oblivion in the bottle? My wife—my odious wife—was always saying that my propensity for drink would bring me to a bad end. I could discern no other solution. I must have got mad-drunk, and under influence of drink and pent-up exasperation have been guilty of some awful atrocity. That current of Spanish blood within my veins! Why should my nature be fiercer than other people's—why should I be unable to control its torrent? Heaven knows that, tried as I was daily, I did my best always with might and main. And a glass too much! Do not most people have a glass too much, sometimes? Why then should it be given to one to enjoy *une ivresse rose*, while for another the slightest divergence from the path of sobriety is fraught with danger? I have heard it said that drink unmasks a man's inner self; that in obedience to the axiom, '*in vino veritas*,' he stands naked, deprived of conventional veneer, when that has gone

in at his mouth, whose mission is to steal away his brains. If that is so, I reflected, then must I be a fiend; and yet I know that such is by no means the case. When sober I am no worse than my compeers. And then past memories crowded upon me, and filled me with misgiving; for I remembered once, at a private carousal, flinging a decanter at a crony, which happily missed its mark. I was pinned down by surrounding friends till sobriety brought repentance in its train, and the crony admitted that he had been in fault. Alone—in a strange town—possibly in questionable company, I must have taken a glass too much, and done——What?

I managed to mumble out in a voice which frightened me, for I seemed never to have heard it sound so strangely :

‘With what offence do I stand charged?’

There was a murmur of amazement in the low-browed hall. A shadowy woman behind a rail at the back, shook her fist and ground her teeth at me. It was evident that I was in evil odour with all present. A central shade rose in the circle before me (black

against the light), and cried out in harsh accents :

‘The man is not sober yet! Know, prisoner, that you stand there charged with wilful murder, in that last night, at a pot-house of questionable repute, you felled a man with a quart-pot, and falling upon him on the ground, proceeded to hammer in his skull with it. Alas! no one can pity you, and it matters little what you say; for you were taken red-handed, made a furious onslaught upon those who captured you, and will most assuredly be hanged. What is your name? whence do you come? You are a stranger in these parts—for none of the police seem to know your face—and belong apparently to a decent class of life. Your clothes are shabby. No papers have been found on you. Your shirt, the searcher tells us, is unmarked.’

Murder — wilful murder! It was I to whom this shade was speaking! Baleful nightmare, why did it not pass? It was not possible that I, a man of good education, of superior culture, should wake up to stand in so awful a predicament as this; that alone

I should stand thus, without the support and countenance of anyone who knew me, who could say who I was and what I was, and by what terrible, and untoward train of circumstances I was forced to appear in this false light.

Such a situation was enough to set a stronger intellect than mine tottering. I was not drunk now, except with excess of anguish; but with overwhelming agony I was indeed blind-drunk and stupefied. Swaying to and fro, and muttering I know not what, and groping before me with quivering hands, I was led away between two stalwart guardians; and the long, low, roaring execration which followed in my wake as I glided away, rings in my appalled memory still, after the lapse of many years of sorrow.

Time passed—who knows how many unnumbered days and nights. I recollect marking the scudding clouds as they swept past the grilled opening which gave air to my solitary cell; then marvelling at other times to find that my window was a plain black square. The door was unlocked now and then, though I hardly heard the rattle of

chains, and locks, and bolts. People came and went, but I did not notice who they were, or hearken to what they said. I have a recollection of a gentleman sitting by my side and reading something, while I wondered that in the dimness he could see to read. He had glasses on which glistened, and I stared at them, speculating whether they were phosphorescent and lighted from within; for I could see nothing but haze, and only hear as through cotton wool. And then the gentleman would cease and remove his glasses, and my listless interest would cease too, as he rose and sighed and slid without motion into darkness, muttering something about idiocy. Then followed a series—monotonous and long—of changes from dark to light and light to dark again.

And then one day, as I was dreaming dimly of a field with sheep and trees and hawthorn bushes in full bloom, I was roughly shaken by the shoulder, while a loud voice shouted in my ear:

‘Your trial comes on in a week. Pull yourself together, my man. Can you pay for legal assistance? Whom would you like

retained? We must have your name. Come, wake up, for your friends must be communicated with.'

I woke up in obedience to the command, starting to my feet as if I had been shot. The lethargy which in mercy had dulled my mind, fell to the earth like a discarded garment, crumbled into dust like the cerecloth of a mummy. I woke from the trance, and my situation stood out in its complete horror, limned in burning letters on the wall. I was about to be tried for slaying a fellow-man. The magistrate had said there was no doubt as to how the case would go. I should be sentenced to be hanged by the neck till I was dead. Oh, if only the last wrestle could be over! My one desire—my only one—was to push on the clock-hands that the moment might arrive more quickly.

Left to myself again, I trotted like a caged tiger up and down the narrow chamber, biting my nails to the quick and beating my palms together in a spasm of tingling nerves. After a time, heaven had pity on my despair. I sank panting, exhausted, and worn out upon my wooden couch, and wept.

Tears brought with them a lull of calm. Clutching my head as though to prevent it from escaping, I gathered the strands of my strength together to force my brain to work, in order that I might review, while the calm lasted, the various salient points of my position. The effort was not unsuccessful, for I saw things all at once with unnatural clearness, as we see objects magnified in water, and the result of the survey was on the whole satisfactory.

The shock which had borne me down had been so terrible, so swift, so complete and overpowering, that, like one who by some accident is mangled beyond hope, the longing that I felt upon returning consciousness was for rest, and not recovery. I felt a parching thirst for rest, absolute and entire—the long, long sleep under the sod.

‘What matters it after all!’ I cynically murmured. ‘The dead sleep as peacefully within the grim enclosure under shadow of the prison-wall, as under the daisied turf and florid tombstones in the churchyard. Once past the Rubicon, are we not all alike, peer, prince, and peasant—aye, and slaughtered

criminal? What matters it to the dead that the living should spurn their tomb? Have not the dead learned the great secret which the living long to know? None but cravens should fear to meet their God. For does He not see better than we can with perplexed vision what our weaknesses have been, what our efforts, our frailties, our temptations? He was but a foolish fellow who said hell was paved with good intentions. Surely they form the pavement of heaven's threshold; for we are weak, and cannot do more than try. Why should I fear death? A decade more or less is as nothing in the great eternity. Those who are happy here may regret to leave a pleasant certainty to plunge into that which they know nothing of. But to a man in a plight like mine, death could mean nothing but release. I could have embraced the hangman, kissed the rope, if only they would appear quickly on the scene and put an end to the suspense which rent my being. And with the thought of a nameless grave within the prison-walls, came a short, sharp pang of exultation—yes, a pang, for it was a blending of extreme joy

and anguish—in that my grave was to be nameless. Fate, if harsh and perverse in one respect, was less cruel in another. If I were doomed to die a felon's death, it was well that the earthly happiness of none who loved me should be marred by the knowledge of the end. The Fates, by a singular arrangement in their weaving, had so settled matters that all trace of me was lost. There was no chance—not the most remote—if I elected to be dumb, of my guardians ever discovering who the murderer was. It would strike nobody to connect the rising young painter of London, who had before him a career of promise and was not known to be more unhappy than most people in his domestic relations, with the midnight brawler in a low tavern of a provincial town. No. My disappearance would cause a few to wonder. I should be advertised for as one who had 'left his home,' be implored to 'return immediately to a distracted wife who would forgive and forget all,' and so forth; then I should be forgotten in nine days at most, and my case would join the long roll of mysteries which never shall be unravelled on this earth.

As I considered this, I wept as for the demise of a dear friend. I wept for myself as for another, seeming to stand as chief mourner by the side of my own solitary grave. And at the same time I was comforted. My wife would speedily console herself, I prophesied, though at first she might endure twinges of conscience in that by her shrewishness she had driven me away. My only ties in the wide world were to herself and Mildred. Mildred, my darling, would miss her papa, and be very distressed, but would get over the April shower of her grief. At least I prayed fervently and honestly that it might be so. Never more should I look into those trusting eyes again, never stroke the wealth of sunny hair whose skeins used to curl so fondly around my fingers, never feel the frail warm clasp of her tiny arms about my neck. I wept softer tears as I dreamed of Mildred, till I fancied that my surcharged heart must burst, and that thus a term was to be put to my troubles without the culminating disgrace of the scaffold.

But it was not to be so. The paroxysm

over, I was calm again. I rose up from my seat and paced the cell, firmly resolved in mind. For my dear child's sake, I would bear unflinchingly, and without extraneous help, the burthen with which I had been loaded. I would be tried, and hanged if need were, but my real name should never pass my lips again. Mildred should never learn that she was a felon's child. I would vanish—a mysterious and stealthy wraith—from among my fellows, and leave no rack behind; and this should support me under the ordeal. The few who loved me, and who would, during pauses of retrospect in their busy lives, think of me sometimes, should be able to do so in years to come with wonder tempered by regret, not with horror and disgusted loathing.



CHAPTER II.

THE BLACK CAP.



Y mind being thus made up, I felt another man; and could reason now and talk sensibly to those who visited my cell. The chaplain came every day, twice a day sometimes, and seemed pleased to think that my reason should have returned before the END. But he knew not the resolve which upheld my courage, nor yet its strength, and taxed my patience sorely with his drone when he would persist in reading to me. He cackled of resignation and of Job. Job, forsooth, belonged to a musty time, if indeed he ever lived at all. What were his troubles of long ago to mine which seared me in the present? What had

he done to deserve his sorrows—what had I done ?

Unhappily, my calmness was but transitory. The dusky element in my blood was incorrigibly warm ; and roused to sudden wrath by the would-be comforter's complacency, I seized the stool on which I had been sitting, and sternly bade him leave me.

The mockery of all this prosing about resignation by one who looked so sleek and smug, was more than the poor hunted, harried human animal could be expected to endure in silence. After that I found myself constantly being watched through a slit in the wall. Voices were to be heard whispering there at all seasons. The authorities evidently considered that I might perchance be mad, and I was placed under the observation of the doctors. Ha ! ha ! I gave vent to peals and shouts of laughter at the thought, and then I sighed. No, no. I was not mad ; I knew all that passed, and felt every sting of every lash of the scourge which lacerated my soul as if each wire thong of it had been forged in the fires of hell. Much

brooding over this conceit begot a fear. What if my mental strength, and with it the strength of my resolve, should collapse under the strain? The tension of the cord was extreme already. What if I should indeed go mad, and blab out my name within hearing of those who watched, ere my lips were closed by the executioner? Frenzied by the thought, for my little Mildred's sake, I made wild efforts to bite out my tongue; tried to strangle myself, to hold my breath—in vain. The watchers understood their work too well; I was put under restraint, and the fever slowly waned.

All admitted, as they diagnosed my case, that it was a singular one. It was clear that I was not shamming. The prison authorities are experts in their art, and can detect at a glance those who attempt deceit. At one moment I was raving mad, at another sane; subject to strange fancies, visions, queer mental whimsies and distortions. It was discovered that I had secreted a pin, and great was the excitement over the discovery, for it seemed plain to those who could not read that I had hidden it for the purposes of

suicide. Wiseacres ! I had secreted that precious pin to pierce my flesh for Mildred's sake, lest, if I fell asleep, I should betray my secret. When they pressed me for my name I shook my head, remarking that I had no name. 'Why not give me a number ?' I gibed. And yet why take the trouble ? It was scarcely worth while to give a number to one who was so soon to go.

The chaplain and the doctor strove to lure from me my name by artifice, but I defeated their tactics with the cunning of a lunatic. All at once it struck me with a fresh thrill of fear, that perhaps I might overreach myself; that perchance by excess of caution, my own ends might be defeated. People who had lost relations might turn their attention to this nameless criminal. As far as I was concerned, I thought 'with bitterness, there was small chance of that. My wife was not one to fly about the country with dishevelled hair in search of her dear lost lord. No; an advertisement or so, for decorum's sake, and then the limbo of oblivion. Did I not know her well ? How wonderful it was that such a woman could be the mother of my blue-eyed darling. Pray

God she would be kind to her! Neither were any of my companions likely to take up the quest, though I had many friends who were fond of me and courted my society. But our friends have families of their own, and business of their own to engross their minds. We must accept the gruesome fact that, in this world, if we slip into a well, there are few even of our chosen cronies who will have time to look down at us. Besides, no one would surely dream of imagining that a respectable and prosperous citizen could all at once—in a moment when reason nodded—reach by one leap the bottom of the abyss of crime. Of course not. And yet murderers have seldom reasoned at the moment when they committed their offence. Jonathan Gayden, the murderer of Chingford, told me, when I met him long afterwards, a poor, pale, haggard creature, like a hunted beast, that he did not know he had committed his crime till he saw a prostrate figure on the ground. He broke into a house one Sunday morning, as everybody will remember, when decent people were at church, and seeing an old woman on the stairs, was so frightened

by the sight that he was irresistibly impelled to slay her.

‘How was that?’ I remember asking; for I wondered if his case was similar to mine.

‘It was the instinct of self-preservation,’ he replied. ‘It was not her fault or mine that she should have seen my face. But she had seen it, and there was no alternative. Either she or I must perish. She was old and I was young, so there could be no doubt as to which should be the victim; and yet I did not think of this till it was over. There was no time for thought; so instinct, dethroning reason, acted on her own account, and during twenty years of remorseful wandering, reason has lashed me with her whip!’

I would like to know how many excellent but irascible men, who have been gathered to their fathers in the odour of sanctity, have been at some time or other in their lives on the brink of the great offence. If such a hidden mystery could ever be unveiled it would astonish us all, I think, no little. A moment of anger so hot as to blind the sight as well as to confuse the brain. A knife

ready to the hand. Ah well! You who have been gifted with sluggish blood have much to be thankful for, and should cultivate compassion for your less fortunate brethren. Although irritable, my friends liked me none the less for it, because, the tornado past, I was always ready to make amends, and irritable people are nearly always earnest. Frequently, when goaded by passion, I had said rude things; when under the spell of liquor, had done deplorable things; but then I had craved forgiveness, and tried hard to amend my ways, and which of us is so perfect as to be justified in refusing pardon? I had done foolish things and been sorry, and the effect of them had been blotted out. Who among the friends who liked me and admired my talents would ever suppose that by fortuitous circumstances I should ever be brought into such a predicament as this? The notion was preposterous. Such a proposition never could or would enter into the head of my most imaginative cronies. But for all that I determined to be on the safe side, to hedge myself about with caution; and therefore I announced all of a sudden, for the

benefit of those concerned, that I had changed my mind, and would divulge my name. It was Ebenezer Anderson, I declared, and hugged myself as they took a note of it—for it was nothing of the kind; even the initials were not the same. Thus encouraged, they urged me to confess my rank in life. My clothes, though soiled and worn, were of fashionable make; my shirts quite new; my hands soft and white. What was I, and where was my abode? Fools! I repeated that my name was Ebenezer Anderson; that I had no friends, no fixed abode; that I was a waif and stray with no belongings; and then quietly submitted to the will of destiny.

Nothing could have been more calm and collected than was the murderer when he appeared in court. He was seen to cast one nervous look around as though in search of a familiar face. His white cheek flushed with a pink tinge as a smile of satisfaction crossed his features, and he became white again, and communed with himself. At all events the reporters said so (I had the curiosity to ferret out the newspapers a great while later on); and they were in the right. I did cast an

anxious, searching glance around. It was not likely that anyone I knew should happen to attend the Carlisle assizes on that particular day, but Fortune had already proved so cruel that I might be excused for dreading yet another thrust. But no ; the prayer of the foredoomed was answered for my innocent daughter's sake, and I could bear anything now. My Mildred, if when she grew up she should seek to delve into the past, would be without a clue to the dreadful truth. My shame would be buried with me within the guarded circle where I slept, beneath the nameless flag under the shadowed wall.

What need to recapitulate the trial ? The case was but too clear. A banged and battered metal pot was produced, and handed round, while everybody shuddered. It must have been a fearful blow ! The landlord of the public-house told a rambling tale, and blundered down byways of narrative, from which he was pulled back with difficulty. Witness after witness appeared to corroborate his evidence ; a weariful train of witnesses who droned the same sickening story. I had murdered some stranger for some reason

unknown. There could be no doubt of that. A man whom I did not know—whom, were he to appear before me, I should fail to recognise—whom, to all intents and purposes, I had never even seen !

The black cap was assumed : the voice of the judge quivered with emotion as he pronounced the awful words ; and after that he trotted off to dinner. From that instant my existence ceased, my sand-grains were counted. Society had flung me from her. The fine ladies drank up their sherry and mumbled the last sandwich, and swept away the crumbs, and then drove off to call on envious neighbours, to expatiate over five o'clock tea upon the enjoyable day that they had passed.

The door of the court was closed on me and my misfortunes. Having crossed that threshold I was already dead by law. No fear of betrayal now, for I should see no faces henceforth save those of the warders, of the chaplain, and then the hangman. I had but six days to linger out on this ill-balanced globe—only six short days—and I was filled with joy and thankfulness. How the chaplain worried me with his indefinite

promises of comfort ! What could he know of the matter more than I, who was as well educated, and more well-read perhaps than he. It was sufficient for the victim of untoward circumstance to be certain that he was to go. Any change must of a surety be for the better ; for no other world could be more ghastly or more drear to him than this. But Fate had not yet done sporting with her prey.

The trial caused a great sensation. It was canvassed in every home. Well intentioned busybodies bestirred themselves on behalf of the waif without belongings. In London portly city gentlemen on their way to office-desks discussed on the tops of omnibusses that curious Carlisle affair. The case of this Ebenezer Anderson, they argued, was an unusual one ; though its foundation-stone was the old, old story of the Demon Drink. When, oh when, would a tortoise-like government see that some better accommodation was provided for such strays, than that which was connected with the gin-shop ?

Some insisted that this Ebenezer must be a maniac. Some murmured weak platitudes

anent temporary insanity, and despatched parcels of improving tracts to Carlisle gaol ; some wrote to the murderer and hoped that he was ashamed of himself, and that he was glad to have no chance of drinking any more ; some roundly propounded the opinion that sane or insane this man should not be hanged, for it was admitted that he was under influence of liquor when he did the deed, and that in itself is a form of madness. This felon must not be allowed the mercy of the rope. That was what it all came to. He must be given time to chew the cud of his enormities. He must be consigned to durance vile for the remainder of his natural span—it was fortunate that he was so young—to expiate by a long life of untold misery one fatal instant of unreason. The Society for the Suppression of Capital Punishment commenced an agitation which was warmly supported by the public. The wretched man was panting for release, but he might not be let off so cheaply. Memorials were freely signed and sent in shoals to the Home Secretary, who promised to consider the matter ; and one morning, when Ebenezer was staring

vacantly at passing clouds, and counting the hours which must drag their length along before he was permitted to pass through the golden portal into Light, the chaplain looked in with a smile and wished him joy.

He was reprieved. He was to live. Was he not glad? Glad! No. He was indignant. The world had cast him out into the great ocean of the Unknown. The World would have none of this noisome thing—no more would Death. Both in ebb and flow the waves rejected him; the waters flung him back bruised and bleeding, but living still, upon the beach. His penance was not complete. Not yet was he to enjoy the luxury of sleep under the prison wall. For a weary cycle of years he was to drag his chain—years, each one of which should consist of three hundred and sixty-five days and nights of torture; and during the weary probation he must be vigilant, argus-eyed, to keep wakeful watch and ward over his secret for his daughter's sake. His secret! Who cared about that now? What mattered the convict's name? The ominous word 'Life' was to be inscribed on the card

over his door ; the letter L was to be sewn upon his sleeve. 'Till tardy-footed Death should think fit to have mercy on his sorrows he was no more to possess a mind, or thoughts, or feelings, or affections. He was henceforth a piece of clockwork, with a number on it. He had sinned, and his manhood was the forfeit for his sin.

I displayed so little gladness at the prospect opened to me, that the chaplain was disappointed, and even began a sermon about taking up one's cross and carrying it with a cheerful aspect, not a sullen one. But his affecting periods were brought to a lame and impotent conclusion by a threatening glitter in the eye of the reprieved, which hinted, that although so blessed as to be denied the scaffold, he might have the bad taste to be ungrateful and dangerous. The chaplain had seen and shuddered at the pewter-pot, with the great dent upon the rim of it. He glanced at the convict's young and athletic frame, and deemed it prudent to withdraw, muttering complaints as he went, with shakings of the head, about the wickedness of human nature and its ingratitude for 'mercies.'

Mercies ! It was a mercy that he went away in time. Often have I thanked God upon my knees for having been given strength to avoid smiting him. What crimes are committed, what injuries are done merely through want of tact ! In prison it is natural that officials should become callous. How would it be possible for a chaplain to go on day by day and year by year really feeling for the sorrow-stricken creatures round him, grieving for their griefs ? In a short time he would dissolve quite away through shedding constant tears, or else retire to end his days in the seclusion of Bedlam. True sympathy which softens the hardened heart being then out of the question, would it not be better to mouth less about mysteries of which we none of us know anything, and be content with simple kindness ? During the period of my probation, I was always being preached at, and from a standpoint of aggressive superiority which never failed to stir the hidden fire. Sympathy, could I have enjoyed the priceless boon in the shape of a silent pressure of the hand, might have done much to keep me

straight, but in the natural course of things it was unattainable, and so I did not keep straight.

It appears that from the very commencement of my new life, I was sullen. At least the chaplain said so, and, being a man of experience with regard to convicts, he should have been right. Small wonder if I had become sullen, considering what I was called upon to bear. No, he was not right. Sulkiness was not natural to a character such as mine, which was as quick to resent as to forgive. How long would it be before the forked flame became a smouldering glow? My soul now was tingling all over with a sense of wrong. The gate had been set ajar. I had peeped through into the radiance, then it was shut again, and I was left in darkness—darkness how unutterably black—darkness *which might be felt*. Left alone to consider my future career, I underwent paroxysms of anger, of pure abortive rage. I banged my hands against the wall till the whitewashed stone was smeared with blood, and watching gaolers warned me to desist. I foamed at the mouth and raved aloud—cursed heaven

for its mocking light, earth for its injustice. P. S. L. *Penal servitude for life!* That was the badge I was to carry. I, impulsive, yet soft of heart and débonnaire; as sensitive as all are who worship the goddess Art—fond of music, of the drama, of social chats and cosy little gatherings; of the hundred and one delightful odds and ends which make up the artistic life; I, who adored the beautiful, and who was only twenty-three years old! I was informed that if I behaved well for twenty years, I might perhaps have my case reconsidered, and even be released upon a ticket-of-leave. An extra insult this. Twenty years—a long-drawn, excruciating martyrdom! Already the dark drop in my blood had worked havoc irretrievable. Could I, goaded and tormented at every turn, disgraced for ever with the brand of Cain, hope to keep my unruly temper in constant check for twenty years? Could I hope to endure with stoic calm the thousand petty persecutions of ignorant jacks in office?

The human mind, until educated and brought under subjection by discipline, is apt to be tyrannical. Are not most lads, until they are taught

better, tormentors and torturers? Do they not love to inflict pain, merely to enjoy the homage due to superior force, which they read in each contortion of their victim? Prison warders do not of necessity become angels when they don their uniform. They are underpaid, and their calling is more hard than most. In all social groups some of the component parts are good, whilst some are bad. During my martyrdom, into the hands of how many tyrannical warders should I chance to fall? To what pitch of desperation might they goad me? Would Fate, having thrown me on my face, be now content? Was it likely that unless my character was to undergo a complete change, I could have the least hope of enduring with meekness, blows, abuse, insult, injustice? No. Not even for my golden-haired Mildred's sake. Twenty years hence she would be grown up, be happily married, with sunny-locked little Mildreds of her own about her skirts. *For her sake.* What folly! I must be doting to allow such empty words to pass my lips. What had I, the convicted felon, to do with her? She had only known her

father as a little child, and young children's memories are like fair slates. What would she be taught about the absent one? She would learn some time that her father had disappeared in a fit of temper; had gone off perhaps like a scamp with some shameless paramour, leaving her mother and herself to starve.

Even if, through consistent good conduct, I could achieve ultimate release, what could I have to do with my darling in the dim future? Nothing—absolutely nothing. To her I was as dead as if I lay in the envied grave, with the swelled mark of the rope about my neck and the green damp stone over my head.

Come what might, my darling must never know the gaol-bird. Why should I desire release? I did not desire it. The world, if it deigned ever to receive me again, could give me nothing in return for a shattered life. 'Twere better—far, far better—that the card with 'Life' on it should never be removed from off my door.



CHAPTER III.

“HERE I AND SORROW SIT.”

MY meditations were interrupted in order that I might comply with the first of the set of rules which were to regulate my new existence. My beard and moustache were shaven, my hair was cut close. I put on a mustard-coloured coat and vest, loose knickerbockers of fustian, and woollen stockings of blue and red ; and in this hideous guise was bidden to sit still with hands displayed, in order that I might be photographed for the benefit of the police.

A few days later, I was handcuffed and put into the train—in how different a condition from the one in which I had arrived at that railway station of Carlisle ! Where was

I going ? I did not know or care. Henceforward I, who had shown myself incapable of self-government, was to have no responsibilities, but to do humbly such work as I was set to do, eat what I was given, sleep when it should by superior authority be so ordained. Henceforth obedience was the one virtue that I might exercise. We travelled from early morn till evening ; and then by the banks of smoke before us, I could see that we were approaching London.

Presently masses of streets twinkled out with glimmering lights. I heard the roar of traffic, which was as familiar music in my ears ; and slackening speed, we entered the terminus, where a huge dark vehicle stood among the cabs for the behoof of me, the outcast. One of my guardians whispered that we would remain where we were till all the passengers were gone, as doubtless I did not desire to affront curious observation in my new disguise. I replied that I did not care, for nothing mattered any more, and then subsided into listless reverie.

As I stepped into 'Black Maria,' the cabmen crowded round, and regarded me with

interest mixed with pity. Even they could afford to pity one who had sunk so low as I.

The door clanged to ; the window shutter was raised. One warder took his place by the driver on the box, another by my side within. I heard somebody murmur 'Pentonville,' and then, locked up in semi-obscurity, I turned about to examine the vehicle which carried us. We were enclosed in a rough omnibus, dimly lighted from above by a grating which served also as a ventilator. The familiar rattle over the stones sounded strange. I had never thought to hear the well-known sound again. We were driving at a rapid pace through streets every brick and flag of which I knew by heart, and I was suddenly impelled by a wild longing to take one parting glimpse of the old world before the new one loomed upon my sight.

My guardian dozed, so I clambered stealthily up upon the seat, and, supporting myself by my elbows as well as handcuffed wrists would permit, craned upwards to the grating. The shops and houses flitted by like mocking phantoms. There, on the right, was a shop where I used to buy cigars,

round that other corner was the newsagent's, where, opposite a pillar-letterbox, I had been wont to purchase papers while my wife was haggling with her dressmaker ; for in that other street, not ten paces off, lived the lady who was responsible for her elaborate costumes, and my wife was always fond of dress. How wonderful that we should pass through this particular neighbourhood where every object was as a milestone ! And we were passing quickly through it in our gloomy and eye-less vehicle, at which passengers stared with repulsion as we flitted by, as if indeed this joyous noise and bustle had naught to do with the plague-stricken one, who was part and parcel now of a new and hidden world, whose temple was the charnel-house.

Yet how foolish was I to think it strange. We were following the direct route from the station to the prison, threading the widest thoroughfares. There was nothing strange about the matter except myself, the carefully caged animal. What if I should catch a glimpse in passing of some old friend, of some studio crony or boon companion ? I half hoped that such might be the case, half

dreaded lest it should, and undecided betwixt hope and fear, peered with concentrated attention at the playbills, pictorial advertisements, illuminated shop-fronts — anything which, newly and vividly impressed, might serve to distract my thoughts in my approaching solitude from a never-ending contemplation of myself. What was that—there—by the corner near the newsagent's? Heavens! My wife and little Mildred! Then I was destined to look once more on them. I took one glance, and after that, stricken with terror by an idea that they might see me, leaped down, and crouching, hid my face between my hands!

My wife had evidently been to her dress-maker's, perhaps to order widow's mourning for me, and a black frock trimmed with crape for little Mildred. How strange—how passing strange was this death in life! She did not look anxious or worn with weeping. On the contrary, she looked no less robust and stern than usual, as, holding Mildred by the hand, she waited with tiptilted nose upon the curb for 'Black Maria' to rumble past, before crossing the street on her way homeward.

She had glanced at the carriage with indifference, then turned sharply round to shake the child, who frightened by the big black vehicle, hung back.

O God! I groaned, have mercy, have mercy on that child! Let my torment be what it may, I will bear all gladly, thankfully, if by so doing I may take as well upon my shoulders the burthen of life-troubles of that fatherless one. Soften the nature of that woman that she may be indulgent at least to her. What a coincidence that I should have been enabled to look out of my tomb upon that pair—that they should have glanced idly at the hearse which bore away the dead husband, father, and that they should have no presentiment of what corpse it carried! Why was this? I kept asking myself. Was it that I might bear in my festering heart the comforting assurance that my darling grieved for me? Yes. That must be it; and as I crouched groaning at the bottom of the carriage, I was thankful. The child was pale, her eyes were red, her baby-lips compressed. She missed her unhappy father, and was sorry. That was a vision

which I would cherish with jealous care, and contemplate every day to prevent its fading ; and the contemplation of it should be my reward for the voluntary abandonment of all ties, all hopes.

‘Black Maria’ drew up under the *porte cochère* of Pentonville prison ; my guardian awoke with a start ; there was a mighty rattling of bars and bolts, and the great door swung creaking on its hinges like the mouth of some yawning giant, to receive the insignificant new-comer.

The governor happened to be standing at the door of his own house hard by, and followed in to take the measure of the last arrival. He put some questions with reference to the past, but could draw little from me. Whilst to all appearance drowsy and apathetic, my whole attention, my whole being was absorbed in the vision I had just looked upon.

The delicacy and whiteness of my hands told him that I must have been gently nurtured, but as to intellect or education, I apparently could boast of neither. The little intellect I could command was fully occupied,

the rest was still blurred by the great shock. Its flow was stagnant and icebound. I was come to Pentonville to undergo under the care of this gentleman nine months of solitary confinement before being drafted to hard labour upon Public Works. Were nine months of brooding likely to bring about a thaw? I heard the governor whisper to his second in command :

‘The man’s brain is numbed ! Place him among the knitters on the second landing.’

And so it came about that my cell was on the second storey ; that next morning I was well supplied with wools of blue and red, and an array of needles, and duly initiated into the craft of making stockings.

A tiny little cell like a ship’s cabin, specklessly washed white, well lighted, well warmed by a current of hot air. The second landing was one of a series of open balconies running one above the other, four stories high, along the whole length of a lofty hall which formed one of three, branching from a common centre ; so that a principal warder, standing there on the asphalt floor, could, without much walking to and fro, keep his

eye upon the entire honeycomb. The slender steel rods of the balconies and the skeleton winding staircases which connected them—all polished to winking-pitch—seemed to me like the strands of some glittering silver cobweb.

We malefactors were the flies; the warders who paced below or sauntered on the landings, leaning over the rails from time to time to mark the summons of a prisoner's bell, were the spiders, who, with as many eyes as has the peacock's tail, watched our conduct ceaselessly.

During the first weeks after my arrival at Pentonville my mind flitted, as a moth does about a candle, round the fascinating contemplation of insanity. How was all this to end—and when? That I had endured with patience up till now was a constant source of surprise; that so commendable a condition of things should last was not to be hoped. Even if by miracle it did, and I came to win release at the end of two decades, what an interminable vista was formed by that grim array of twenty years for the contemplation of a man of three-and-twenty! Even if I

did achieve ultimate release, I should be called upon to commence life afresh, at the age of forty-three, without a friend or acquaintance on the earth, and with the odour of the prison clinging to my garments. Nothing could be more futile than to think of liberty. The only escape to which evil fate permitted her victim to look forward was by the pathway of madness or decease. My health was excellent, despite my mental anguish. I was young, stalwart, athletic, sound of wind and limb—horribly well, in fact. It was idle to expect the relief of death, except by accident; and how could a fortunate accident occur to me, enclosed as I was by an iron circle wherein order reigned supreme, where each human atom was as carefully watched and tended as if, instead of being a broken vagabond, of as little value as a counterfeit sixpence, he were as precious as the Koh-i-noor?

The clicking of the needles, and the monotonous existence I was leading, by little and little soothed my jarred nerves; the extreme quiet tranquillised my cloudy brain. I could *think*—coherently, not by fits and starts—clearly and more clearly day by day.

Insanity or Death.

Alas! neither harbinger of Lethe was likely to bring an answer to the petition of the outcast. In an indistinct way memory recalled an ancient fresco which I had admired once at Pisa—The Trionfo della Morte, master-piece of Orcagna's genius—wherein the starving and the gaunt and those deprived of hope are clamouring for Death, while the awful being with lank streaming hair and sublime passionless lineaments floats calmly out of reach to mow down a cowering row of kings.

I soon became an adept in my new craft. Always natty and sensitive and lithesome, by reason of their cultured exercise, my fingers moved in a few weeks in as mechanically assured a rhythm as those of a German housewife. My attention, no longer engrossed by the intricacies of stitches, wandered away from the stockings; and the contemplation of my position dragged me to the earth. As I stared at the white walls and marked their subtle changes of tone—the practised vision of the artist had not lost its cunning yet—from white to grey, and then

to delicate tints of yellow—beginning with primrose, through daffodil to crocus—and then to white again, or sometimes dun, a gust of grinding despair swept past, wrenching my every limb and sinew, while I counted up all that I had lost. Ah me! is not our perversity amazing, in that we never realise that we are well off until our felicity has ceased to be? Look at children and study them. They are harassed as yet by no breath of the fell blast which silvers men's locks before their time. They attach no meaning to the word anxiety. It is an empty sound; and yet they break their little hearts over woes which only provoke a smile of derision from us who have tasted of the bitter waters. If they could but appreciate their good-fortune whilst still it is in their grasp, instead of doing so through the medium of regret, maybe their condition would approach too near to that in heaven; and the troubles of after-life would fall too much as the east wind does upon shorn lambs.

What is, is for the best, we are told, if our limited capacity could but be aware of it. No rapture in this life lasts longer than a

moment. It is only pain that is enduring, and that can be counted on. Serenity, and not active happiness, is the loftiest condition to which the most fortunate of mortals can aspire to mount, save for an instant. It is certain that the highest degree of serenity is to be reached by making the most of the rosiest specks in the present, without regretting what has gone before or wondering what may follow. This is the enviable condition of the beasts of the field, which neither smile nor weep, and which, being possessed of no particular expression of countenance, we stigmatise as brutes ; whereas, if we but knew it, they live probably much pleasanter lives than the most blessed among us, though we may in our vain conceit choose to dub ourselves the lords of the creation !

Would you not rather, O fellow-worm, be a hunter in a good stable, or, say, one of Lord Dunmore's pattern bullocks, than a man ? The hunter has many and obsequious servants to whom he pays no wages ; is lighted by gas wherewith he is supplied gratis. He is never worried by bores or duns or tax-gatherers. If he is ill, the establishment is all agog.

If he is well, he is gently trotted out for exercise upon the emerald turf, whilst everybody congratulates everybody else on his well-being ; and ridden by his owner now and then, to be present at an exhilarating run, which he enjoys quite as much as his master. His condition, I admit, is more felicitous than that of the pattern bullock, because it is more varied ; and yet I am not sure that the said bullock is less to be envied. A comfortable field, an airy lodging, a certain enjoyment for a given length of time of sunshine and waving grass and buttercups ; then instantaneous annihilation with a poleaxe. No anxieties in life, none after death ; for (at least we are led to believe so, though why I cannot tell) the said bullock enters no future state, and is therefore not worried by the condition of his soul. If we had no souls how much more satisfactory would our lives be : and yet not the lives of all of us, for the time of a large proportion of the community is chiefly occupied in fishing after other people's souls, which doubtless is very friendly ; and their lives would be dismal in the extreme if deprived

of that harmless recreation. Thus we, lords of creation, are tormented by visions of a future which terrifies because it is a blank, and seek relief in the pursuit of tangible pleasure. The pursuit of pleasure—and what is that? The slavery of a despotic fiend whose appetite, like a greedy creditor, makes fruitless, never-ceasing demands which we can never hope to meet.

I was rendered morbid, you see, by the condition in which I found myself, a condition in which all that makes life bearable to man seemed destined to be squeezed quite out. Again and again I reviewed my position, and from it no crumb of comfort might be obtained. After all, what had I done which should require from me so awful an expiation? Admitted that in an unpremeditated moment of frenzy I had hurried a fellow-man into eternity; what then? That could not be remedied, alas! Was I not burning to follow him? ‘What is the fate of that unfortunate to mine?’ I kept muttering, as I paced my tiny kingdom. People tell us by way of comfort that our ills are of our own making. What if they are? We are

not of our own manufacture, and we acknowledge ourselves to be stumbling, imperfect creatures. If a malign, overmastering influence—call it our domestic demon if you please—upsets our judgment in spite of our feeble efforts, we do what we ought not to do—conscious oftentimes that we are doing wrong, but unable to resist the demon; what satisfaction is it then to us, for whom the sun, maybe, is for ever jaundiced, to be told that we are in the slough through our own fault? Oh, brethren, let us cultivate charity, and avoid improving the occasion when our brother or sister stumbles! A gin has been laid for their feet, they have tumbled into the pitfall, and must bear the scars upon their shins until their dying day—scars which might have been indented upon our own sore shins if we had been placed as they were.

‘Why the pitfall?’ I muttered to myself over and over again, as the stockings grew under my hands. ‘Why was I thrown into temptation which my frail nature could not resist? Why was I, who wished no harm to any man, led into that public bar in that

strange town, there to accomplish, *without knowing what I did*, that dreadful deed, the thought of which makes me tremble? And having done it—much after the manner of a somnambulist whose hand is guided by another hand—why am I to undergo this awful, this soul-withering punishment? Better far the rope, from whose friendly grasp I was plucked by well-intentioned philanthropists; for God is surely merciful if men are not.'

And the case of Ebenezer Anderson, who broods thus over his stockings and pours out the bitterness of his soul to you, is no singular one. Go any day into the female side at Millbank. You will find there many a comely lass who for infanticide has been condemned to death, but whose sentence has been commuted to penal servitude. And what led her to be guilty of infanticide? She was an ignorant country girl, say, who, confiding and unversed in guile, was seduced and then deserted. Thrown upon the streets, her better nature recoiled from the loathsome calling. She returned to her village home and sank down, a penitent, on the threshold

of the cottage where she was reared. Her parents closed the door on her, because of the breathing stigma at her breast. 'What will the neighbours say?' they cried, 'those country neighbours whose cackle is always of other people's tripping?' No! worthy, weak, ignorant people, the shame was greater than they could endure. 'This girl' they murmured, 'must carry her burthen by herself; as she has made her bed, so must she lie on it. She elected to fall and bear a bastard child. Very well, she must go away and reform, and manage somehow to rear it an honest man or woman.' Weeping, she went forth into the night. What was to become of her or of her infant? what chance had she of making good her fault? For herself she could suffer the penalty. Having no other means of earning bread but the one from which she shrank, she would again parade the streets. But her child? Was it to linger on, half-starved, to learn at last that its mother was a prostitute? Never! She passed a pond and flung it in. And for this frenzied act she lost her identity; she now is no more a woman, but a slave—not for a year or two, but for her life—like me,

Ebenezer, or rather Y 122, a being with no feelings, no wishes, no ambitions, no volition and no hope. Yes, *no hope!* there is the terrible key to the situation. A study of the careers of those who are badged L will show that few, save the hardened, survive to return into the world. Many who have committed the great sin have done it under the impulse of overpowering exasperation. Under no circumstances would they be guilty of another class of crime. If they had not thus been tempted they would have led honourable lives—lives such as yours is, or pretends to be. In increasing ratio with the natural goodness of their natures comes the sensitiveness of their despair. Sublime Justice, who affects blindness—she whose glance should be as piercing as an eagle's—is seated too high upon her throne for the spying out of our weaknesses or of our provocation. Raising her bandage for a second, perhaps, she commutes a decree of death, and dreams that no more than this may be expected of her. The law is no respecter of idiosyncrasies. Broad lines are traced which must on no account be over-

stepped. The bumps in our minds must fit into preestablished moulds, the foot must be pruned and hacked till it fits into the boot. If it doesn't, it is its own fault, and must be cut and cut until it does.

Much in this wise did I meditate as I squatted on my stool, while the stockings of my future comrades grew into shape, and the walls darkened to grey and then to dun. Bells rang at intervals for the performance of certain duties. Keys rattled in doors; hurrying feet clattered in the halls or up the iron staircases. The duties over, silence supervened once more, and I worked again and brooded. From time to time a febrile paroxysm shook my frame, a whirl of oaths and curses; and then I was compelled to lay down my knitting, and wring my hands together till they were white and bloodless, in order to prevent myself from shrieking out. My hot, unruly blood was seething. At such moments, if one had come in, I should have hurled my stool at him, and committed again perhaps the crime for which I suffered. At any rate I should be flogged for an assault, and I prayed earnestly to be spared that

humiliation. Then, in the middle of my prayer, I would scoff and curse again.

Twenty years of saint-like conduct might possibly set me free. Ha ! ha ! what a grim joke was this ! Sublime justice stooped to jest ! I never was a lamb, or pretended to be one. What idle, confused prating ! Twenty years. Have I not said that I had no desire for freedom ? That was distinctly understood. I would knit so long as I was told to knit ; then I would do something else. It mattered little what, to me—the piece of clockwork with 122 upon it. When the time came for my removal to Public Works, I should be employed as a field labourer. That was sure to be, on account of my athletic frame. I, a limner of delicate fancies, who had aspired to be a poet upon canvas, who had hoped to chasten public taste by inducing it to conform to the dictates of the Beautiful ? I, a teacher ! I, the degraded felon, the *bête de somme*, the helot henceforward, the hewer of wood and drawer of water, the serf who was doomed to obey the caprice of those who, intellectually speaking, were unfit to tie his shoe-latchet.

The strangeness of this mental picture made me laugh—a laugh which startled me like the rattling of a skeleton, and then, being in jocund mood, I bethought me of other whimsical conceits. I remembered how once—so many centuries ago it seemed—I had heard prison theories discussed by those who said they understood them. I recalled the very accents of a pompous magistrate, who, over his port and walnuts had obligingly given his opinions.

‘Every means must be employed,’ had said that excellent person, ‘to work on the higher feelings of the prisoners both by careful moral training and a supply of wholesome work, through appealing to a hope of advantage as well as to a fear of punishment.’

Heavens ! The words rose up before me now in the gathering gloom of twilight, in flashes which resembled fireworks. How long ago—how long ago ! Work on the higher feelings ! I, sensitive-minded and cultured ; how were they going to work on mine ? For the present they were dormant. I had no higher feelings, and I was thankful to know that it was so, while I wondered

whether they would ever be aroused. Were they defunct, or did they only sleep? Had not these four walls stifled them? I was doing my best to stifle them myself. How should I, the serf, have any higher feelings, now that, with deliberate hand and keen dissecting-knife, I had cut through each quivering, slender ligament of hope? Moral training too! What could moral training accomplish for one like me, who, my cultivated self a corpse, was to begin a groping life again as a labourer, and who, in order to obey my master's will, must apply all energies to mere endurance? I desired to endure with patience, because I wished to escape the lash; but as for preaching and moral training, I would have none of it. The chaplain had called to see me on my first arrival, and I had cursed and put forth my tongue at him, upon which the injured dignitary had retired, vowing he would see me no more till I apologised. Holy man; sleek worm. How laughable was his petty dignity! It was as I wished, however; for he worried me no more, and I was left to my own gloomy pondering.

Here was a singular state of mind. I

blasphemed at religion, and cursed her ministers ; but I was not afraid to appear before my Maker. The exhortations of such men as this man was, are merely wind, insults to a cultured man who is in misery. But the Divine pity, I felt, would lay no store by empty railings wrung from the extreme anguish of one in travail. How shall I plead to Him, I groaned, to shorten my tribulation ? When will the hour of release come—oh, when !

And so it came about that, owing to my complicated mental condition, I was looked upon by the authorities of Pentonville as morose and dangerous, albeit I acted so meekly as to amaze myself. The warders professed to discover a lurking fire in my eye which boded a proximate explosion ; and, kind-hearted janitors, set themselves to produce a catastrophe. In the Zoological Gardens, I remember, the public are exhorted not to irritate the animals ; even to abstain from stirring them up with sticks. But these men set themselves to stir up a wretched, fallen fellow-brother ; they were so marvellously anxious to summon the veiled

devil, who, they averred, was lurking in my eye.

To this end, they were for ever peering through the observation-hole or 'Judas' (as the French have so aptly christened it) in the centre of my door. Boots on tiptoe were constantly creaking along the slate floor of the gallery outside my small domain. That officers in list slippers should perambulate the balconies in order to be sure that their charges are scheming no evil, is a fit and proper precaution. Men who as a body pit their cunning against the intelligence of those set over them, must be fought with their own weapons. Secret espionage is necessary; but in some cases it may be abused. Mine was one of them. The eye at the Judas-hole seemed to sear into my back like a sunray through a burning-glass. My sensitive nature, intensely irritated already, writhed and contorted itself under that pitiless curiosity. Solitary confinement, during which you can never be alone, is a torturing paradox to one situated as I was. I tried to argue with myself that it mattered little whether I were watched or not. I was

knitting stockings, or else I was pacing up and down my cell. I was doing no harm, and all the world might see what I was doing. But then those paroxysms of torment came upon me, born of my desperate state, which, when I had succeeded in mastering them without a scream, left me with water streaming from every pore. How humiliating was it to be watched when in that condition. Those were tussles like Jacob's with the angel—sacred moments of bloody sweat which should be gazed upon by no eye save that of Incarnate Mercy. I find no fault with this part of the system, mind; it is right and proper, and withal necessary; but surely a man's antecedents may be considered in his treatment. It is all very well to say that a 'gentleman' should never fall, and that having fallen he must be treated like the rest. Education, while it sensitises a man's fibre, is incapable of turning weakness into strength. What is exquisite agony to one is nothing to another. If 'moral training' is to lead up the repentant felon to better things, circumstances must be considered which at present go for nothing.

Trivial annoyances which pass over the head of the 'habitual,' leaving it unscathed, brand marks into flesh of a finer grain which corrode and fester there ; and which, not content with that, leave seed as well in ambush whose harvest is made up of scorpions. The younger warders (lads of twenty-five or so) who could not get access to my peep-hole, amused themselves whilst waiting with gazing at my neighbour. What recked he ? Nothing. He was rather proud of being an object of interest, and hummed gaily whilst pretending to work, breaking now and again into a song. Blithely too, he drove nails into a boot upon his knee, for that boot was destined to be worn by a policeman, the criminal's natural foe, and he wished no doubt that, like Jael, he could drive nails into his head.

The young warders, seeing that I objected to being stared at, (clad as they were in brief authority,) delighted in teasing me when opportunity offered. They were bent upon gazing at that devil of mine ; but I was equally determined that, if I could help it, they should not behold him.

I knitted my stockings, and did my menial

work, as was my duty, and retired as far from the Judashole as my cell-limits would permit. As I lay under my blankets, I could see the EYE turned on me even when it was no longer there. Scores of phantoms, who were all eyes, moped through the Judas in the still watches of the night, making hay of my heart-strings. I gnashed my teeth and shook my fists in nervous efforts to exorcise them—in vain; they were but ghosts—the ghosts of the day's suffering which had just passed. My neighbour, who had been equally under observation, snored with portentous regularity. He slept the sleep of babes and of the just.

What did it matter to him if he were looked at? He was undergoing his third sentence, and to him the EYE was company.

The name of this criminal who was next to me was George Virgin, as I discovered in course of time, though he was better known to his associates under the sobriquet of 'Soda.' His sentence was one of twenty years, and he was an incorrigible scoundrel. When I met him, as I often did, upon the landing, the sight of his bull-neck and flabby

face filled me with loathing, just as the noise he made next door, all day and night, filled me with weariness. He was in the habit of dancing breakdowns at odd moments, just to show how much he 'didn't care,' and the assistant warders looked leniently upon his antics, for they knew that he was one of the worst ruffians in the prison, and it is a privilege not given to all to behold so sublime a rascal performing a sort of 'hornpipe in fetters.' Though his penal record (a book kept for each prisoner, wherein the details concerning him are entered) showed an alarming career of crime, yet was this fellow with the bull neck and flabby face more popular with the warders than his neighbour. They found no difficulty in comprehending him, whilst I was a riddle. His behaviour during previous sentences had been all of a piece—a long array of assaults and complaints and punishments. He had been more than once in irons; had been put into the yellow dress sometimes, sometimes into the black; had been guilty of every kind of atrocity and wickedness, and, when he laid himself out for transgressing rules, you might lay odds that

he would do it with a will. The very openness and excess of his brutality surrounded him with a glamour of heroism in which a felon of my kind could not hope to have a share. One who glares and glowers, and whispers to himself and beats his head against walls, then crouches in a corner mumbling for hours, is evidently plotting something. His ways are secret, and he must be carefully reconnoitred. A man who refuses to tell anything of his former life ; who, when spoken to, keeps his lips tight closed, must of a surety be a dangerous character. My upright, haughty bearing, when at exercise, was but a mask ; my stony, still demeanour, when cross-questioned, but a blind. It was decided by the staff that I should break out some day ; that, if I could manage to secrete a nail or a chisel, it would go hard with someone ; that I should probably swing, after all, and that when I did it would be a good rid-dance for the world. The parson sniffed, with chin in air, as he stepped hurriedly past my cell, without a thought of entering it. The only person in the prison who attempted to hold out a helping hand to me, as I wallowed

deeper in the Slough of Despond, was the Governor, and I am compelled to confess, with sorrow, that his well-meant efforts met with small encouragement.

He came to me one day, and, though the chief warder warned him of the risk he ran, he placed a cool hand upon my forehead, and spoke in earnest accents of goodwill.

'You are morose and evil-tempered, I regret to say,' he remarked ; 'and sullen too. Your own sins have brought this trouble on you, so you must bear the brunt of your folly with patience. Yet you have, I admit, done your work well and willingly. It was of the simplest kind, because I gauged your state correctly when you first came here. Am I right or not in supposing that you have a secret canker, something that worries you more than the clothes with the broad-arrow and the close crop?' I shivered, and he felt the movement. 'I thought as much. What is it? Have you a wife—a child ?

'Alas ! yes,' I whispered involuntarily.

'Then give me their address, and I will write to them. I will tell them that, for their sake, you are striving to do well ; that

so soon as the time comes when you will be allowed to write, your letter will be that of a repentant father and husband, who regrets what he has done.'

With a growl, I sprang from my seat, and he drew back a step in surprise. The chief warder hurried in and placed himself before his chief.

'I told you so, sir,' he said. 'This is a desperate villain !'

'You lie !' I shouted, delirious with wild excitement. 'You lie ! You lie ! Who told you that I had a wife and child ? I never said so—liars that you all are ! I am alone in the world—quite, quite alone—with neither kith nor kin ! Set me to what work you will, and I will do it, if I can ; but don't be prying spies ! You are a band of organised tormentors ! If I do my allotted task, why can't you let me be ?'

At this moment a shadow darkened the threshold. It was my neighbour, George Virgin, returning under escort to his hutch, who thrust his tongue into his cheek and nodded at me with an impudent smile of approval ere he vanished.

‘You are trying to deceive me,’ the governor said, gravely. ‘You have both wife and child; you admitted as much when off your guard; but for some reason you now decline to hold communion with them. Do not be stubborn. Give me their address, that I may inform them you are well. Remember, if you behave properly, you may be freed in twenty years, and it will be a good thing to have somebody to go to.’

‘I don’t want to get out,’ I growled, with my hot face flattened against the wall, while every limb trembled. ‘I am a gaol-bird, and I want to stop in gaol, and I *will* stop in gaol unless you goad me on to suicide.’

The governor retired with his suite (I was so dangerous that they formed a circle round him), sighing, as he went :

‘This man is an enigma. What a warp his intellect has got, to be sure. What can it be all about?’

And then I sat down on my stool, and laughed a laugh which was a scornful sneer, as I scoffed after him. Wife and child twenty years hence, forsooth! Much may they know of me, and I of them! Maybe they will be

dead, and we may meet in Heaven ! Till then we shall never meet. I am dead already—dead and half rotten ! And yet I haunt the earth like an uneasy spirit. When, oh when, may I claim peace ?



CHAPTER IV.

COMRADES.



ALTHOUGH this outburst of ill-temper was deplorable, as seeming to show my guardians that they had read my character aright ; yet it did me good, for it served to set the frozen life-blood moving which had dried up when the blow fell. As soon as I was left alone to enjoy such solitude as was possible in presence of the Judas-hole, the violence of the outbreak brought its own reaction. The governor had looked grieved when I flew at him, and I thought to myself, with secret joy, that this was a good beginning for one who did not wish for freedom. It was clear to me that it was beyond the limits of possibility that I should ever go out of prison.

A man who could not control himself better than I did was not one to win a license. But with this feeling of joy came another of apprehension ; and I prayed with earnestness that I might never be led to commit another crime.

The demon was there : I saw him quite as well as the watching warders did. For the future all my energies must be devoted to keeping him in chains, with a little harmless exercise now and then, but no serious vagaries. I must consent to live so long as it was so ordained ; then die, if possible, unsmirched. I should fade gradually away, I felt convinced, despite my healthy bulk ; and succumb at last, not vicious, only heart-broken. However athletic a man's frame may be, it must be affected sooner or later by a mind in torment. That was some satisfaction. And then, as I dreamed over my stockings, I was surprised to discover that I should wish to die unsmirched, and I smiled at the whimsical discovery. This dangerous felon, who was visited by his keepers now in couples, was actually anxious to behave himself decently ! Then he could not be so very bad as yet.

Was he to become so, or what strange end was reserved for him at the termination of that long, long vista? Was he to reform? Was 'moral training' to be brought to bear on him? and if so, with what result? Or was he to be thrown into curious company, which inch by inch should corrode his better self till none of it was left. He would become, perhaps, like his neighbour Mr. Virgin; or worse, for the advantages he had received from early training would give him additional facilities for crime. And then, as I thought of the persons who would wear these stockings, and who would become my daily comrades so soon as the period of solitude was over, I was filled with a great fear, which caused my soul to quake, my brow to grow wet and clammy. But sufficient unto the day is the evil that it brings. If I were doomed to become a hardened criminal the fault would not be mine. At this moment I desired to be spared from committing worse offences than would safely keep me till death within the prison walls. If in the dim future my character was to be changed, it would be through influences over which I had no con-

trol, and for which I should be responsible in nowise. But I dreaded the possibility none the less, and when my thoughts took this turn I strove hard to think of Mildred as last I saw her, the remembrance of whose tear-stained face should keep me straight—the sad white face which had been shown to the felon ere he was shut away in order that he might be assured that his darling sorrowed for him, and keep within bounds for her sake.

And the golden vision was as an oasis in my dismal dreaming. Like a fairy she worked upon my heart. The reflection of her yellow hair warmed the white walls, gilded my meditations, and threw me into softer moods. Dissolving views glided before my sight, of cows and skies, and hawthorn in full blossom ; of jocund woods in budding spring ; of sedgy bits of moorland glowing with russet hues ; of little creeks and favourite turns of dear old Father Thames, where many a time I had sketched and been happy among the buzzing insects over my work, while Mildred chased butterflies or surveyed her portrait in the stream. More for-

fortunate is he who is stricken blind than another who is brought sightless into the world; for once at least he saw. Bountiful Nature, whom I loved so well, was shut out from me for ever—but sweet memories of what she was—of how fair and varied were her robes—remained to me; no prison locks could bolt them out. Minute pictures of her beauty were impressed upon my retina, and as I gazed on them I wept; and as my tears fell drop by drop, my mental storm was stilled.

As month after month went by in the monotony and calm of Pentonville, I shut myself more and more closely within a bower of my own weaving, living a charmed life; and then the watching warders, more puzzled than before, made up their minds that I was mad. The demon was disappointing, for he was lethargic. He slumbered like a dormouse in mid-winter; there was no fun to be got out of him. The silence and order of a close-prison lulled and soothed his senses into artificial calm. Decidedly a disappointing demon, who failed altogether to carry out the expectations he had raised. There was

no doubt that he was singularly quiet; but he was there still, although asleep, and I looked forward with unalloyed terror to the change which the ninth month was to bring with it. As things were, I was content, turning out my weekly quantity of hosen, scarce knowing that I knitted them; and grew, as weeks wore on, almost to like my cell, as invalids grow to like their beds, and resent the order to arise from them. When it was my duty to help in the dusting of the chapel, or to scrub the asphalté floors, I finished my task as quickly as possible in a dreamy sort of ecstasy, in order to return as soon as I might to solitude and rumination. When a man has been guilty of so serious an offence as to warrant the rejection of society, it is wisely arranged that he should have nine months of solitary confinement before taking his place in the long roll of working slaves. To some this is torture; to others it brings peace. To me it brought peace, and I longed with a great longing to remain as I was until the End. But that goal to which I looked so ardently seemed farther away than ever. An abstemious but wholesome diet, and a regular

routine kept me in the best of health. Bodily, I never felt better in my life than now ; for my mind was unaccountably at ease, and I perceived with dismay that at this rate I might go on calling upon Death till I was eighty.

Perhaps it would be best after all that I should be plucked from this uncanny calm ; that I should be hurled into the dreaded vortex, to battle and be buffeted awhile as a preliminary to that coveted repose. The time was coming for action. It grew nearer as the hours waned. I, the cultured artist, the gentleman of fastidious tastes and refined feelings, was to wield the shovel of the navvy. Well ! it was to some purpose that Heaven had bestowed on me strong thews and sinews. Hitherto my employment had been sedentary --the thews and sinews had been wasted. Now it would be otherwise. When the time came I would try and do my best, and endeavour to deaden my intellect by occupying it with barrowfuls of mud. This was part of the punishment which I was to undergo. Intellect was to be unseated. The artist was no longer to be allowed the privilege of work-

ing with his brain ; the animal was to resume the mastery and to work like a mill-horse, with vulgar bone and muscle.

But oh, those future comrades ! Save for dread of them, I would have bowed under the yoke with comparative cheerfulness. I would have consented to do the labour of a dray-horse without murmuring, if only it might have been done *alone* ! In the close-prison of Pentonville new-comers have small opportunity for diagnosing the characters of their future companions. I saw mine in chapel, on cleaning days, in the exercise yard ; but however much we might desire to indulge in conversation, there was little opportunity for speech. As the weeks rolled away I resolved that I must shake off my dreaminess, be in less of a hurry to go back into my cell, and investigate the peculiarities of those about me. Perchance I was fashioning a bugbear out of my inner consciousness. There are felons and felons. Perhaps I might be lucky enough to be thrown in contact with one or two who, like myself, had stumbled once, as it were by accident. It would be well to turn my attention to those who were here now, for

it was on the cards that we might be drafted on together, and that these very men, whose acquaintance I had yet to make, were destined to be the only friends whom I was to know for the remainder of my natural existence. That they should all look villains was not a subject for apprehension. The cropped pates, and peculiar clothing, and homely shoes bring all to the same outward level. No doubt I myself, with my burly frame, looked a formidable ruffian. I was glad that there was no mirror in the prison. We were spared at least the pain of looking at our altered selves.

The exercise-yard at Pentonville is arranged in a series of paved circles, one inside the other; and on this limited promenade the convicts are set to walk for a given time each day round and round and round, in single file.

On the very next morning I put my project in execution, and began to examine my fellow-prisoners, instead of indulging in misty day-dreams. At a first glance they were a repulsive-looking set enough, downcast, wan, and jaded, oppressed by solitary confinement;

and a more minute examination did not tend to relieve my anxiety. Chance usually arranged the order of our walking, and it came to be the excitement of the day to guess whose turn it would be to march in front of me. There is as much character in a back as in a front, and that character comes out more vividly when a party are all dressed alike. Some of my fellow-prisoners, I observed, dragged one leg listlessly behind the other round the paved circle, as if even this small exertion were too much trouble ; some stepped out briskly, almost jauntily, as if snapping fingers in the face of fortune ; some walked with measured pace, sober, self-contained, as though on ordinary business along an open road. As I became accustomed to my situation—I will not say resigned—I found myself weaving histories for all these men, idle stories about the lives that they had led, their ways, conduct, crimes, what not ; drawing inspiration from the twist of an ungainly hip, or the turn of a rounded shoulder ; marking with artistic eye the contour of each blue-stockinged leg. It is sad to have to confess the trivialities which en-

grossed my mind ; yet am I obliged to admit that as often as not the dangerous convict, who was supposed to be plotting something awful, who (some whispered) had even menaced the governor himself, was engaged in surveying the said stockings with the eye of a connoisseur, considering how the red rings might be more effectively managed, how unevenly knitted were the hosen, and how coarse the wool was of which they were manufactured.

Prisoners in the Bastille have, I believe, been mightily exercised by the proceedings of a rat, have wept bitter tears over the untimely demise of a spider ; why, then, should not I come to display an interest in the trade I had been taught ? At all events, it was an improvement, as occupations go, upon my recent practice of eating out my heart. We are all formed of many moods, as contradictory as they are complex. In moments of genuine grief we find ourselves criticising the pattern of the handkerchief which we have just made sopping wet. I, (not the rising painter, but) the felon Ebenezer Anderson, began to cultivate an interest in stockings,

and, after a languid fashion, in the men also who wore them.

Three men out of the batch specially arrested my attention, and, as after-events turned out, they all three laboured in the same party with myself on Public Works. One was my unruly neighbour on the second landing, Mr. George Virgin, who rejoiced in the elegant cognomen of 'Soda,' the same who had in passing nodded encouragement when he thought that I was insulting the governor. Him I knew to be a ruffian of the deepest dye, a prize scoundrel who would be certain of the wreath if the inmates of penal establishments were allowed to compete for the crown of Rascaldom. As yet it was impossible that I should learn much of his antecedents; the little I then knew was heard during our weekly hair-cutting, when men and warders whispered together as though the *consigne* of silence were removed for the time-being. He was a big, broad-backed fellow of herculean strength, with a width of shoulder such as rendered his marvellous escape nothing less than a miracle—but I am moving on too fast. Viewed from

behind, his aspect was unprepossessing in the extreme ; for his bull-neck sat in rolls upon the coarse cotton regulation handkerchief which served as necktie, while his back was round, one shoulder was higher than the other, and, one hip being more prominent than its fellow, there was a jerkiness about his slouching gait which did not improve his appearance. The back view of Soda gave me no desire to cultivate his acquaintance. It was not that I feared his strength ; for if he was stalwart so was I, and I had been accustomed all my life to box and wrestle.

Another back which told its own tale was that of Jaggs—L. R. Y. 233—who, once a clerk, hailed now from the swell-mob. He was tall and thin, and by nature far from graceful, being square of build and marked with horizontal lines like a gridiron ; but in his case art had thrown nature into the shade. The superb curve of his spine made you forget the alto-relievo of his ribs ; the admirable *tenue* of his elbows caused you to forget their sharpness ; the suave elasticity of his strut compelled you to confess the picturesqueness of knickerbockers, even when smeared with the broad

arrow. His back, at all events, was 'quite the gentleman,' in spite of its hideous livery; and yet this fellow was a hopelessly habitual criminal—as much so in his way as Soda, he being known to the authorities in Scotland Yard by the name of 'the man of many laggings.' The warders, as a rule, liked Jaggs (and they had plenty of opportunities of appreciating his good points), because he amused them with his quaint talk and never gave them any trouble. This I, of course, learned later. He spoke of himself as of somebody else, for whom he was very sorry; was accustomed to say plaintively that he was a sheep which cruel people were always taking to the shambles, and his metaphor was an apt one in the main; for inside the prison-walls his conduct was always exemplary, his penal record unspotted by serious reports; but once set free, he was sure to get into a mess immediately, and be brought back with a semi-rueful smirk as to his natural habitation.

'I am not a sinner,' he always impressed upon those who listened to his discourse. 'I am the prey of wolves, the ingenuous skipping lambkin. Look after me, and none

will be more excellent than I. But the fact is, I am not fit to be trusted alone. The babe unborn, that's the sort of inconvenient thing I am; and surely that's no fault of mine? There ought to be a company started to supply persons such as I with nurses, just as the indigent are supplied with trusses and crutches and all that kind of necessary lumber. When I make my fortune I'll engage a nurse; meanwhile it's only fair that somebody else should engage one for me.'

But with all his boasted innocence Jaggs was exceedingly leery. Cunning looked out of his cold-blue eye; there were curls of shrewdness about his thin lips; his long fingers were as supple as snakes, and could boast of a close acquaintanceship with three mystic thimbles and the vagaries of one artless little pea.

There were backs moving round those paved circles of broken-down disreputable old men; grey-polled, palsied reprobates, who glanced sideways at the warders like a hare, whilst they hobbled round and round as if to the manner born. Their shambling footsteps seemed to have worn individual tracks

upon the stone ; and as the aged rascals tottered and limped along, they appeared to be following their own private marks, commenced long ago, when the prison was first opened.

Then there was Miffy's back. Poor Miffy ! of what a deplorable type was that unfortunate, who indeed was more sinned against than sinning. All his lines were curves. The inherent feebleness of his nature was betrayed by his every lurch. He was quite young, and neither short-sighted nor paralysed, but for all that he dragged a leg ; and yet he had never worn irons, (though from his manner you might have suspected that he had) for this was his first offence. Every movement that he made was undecided ; his limbs hung loosely, and his fingers were always twitching. The only occasion on which he had ever shown decision had certainly not been fortunate, for he was a village postmaster by trade, who had made away with some stamps. How it was that he came to do so was not quite clear even to himself. Indeed there was very little about Miffy's brain that was clear. It is possible that if

the jury had been aware how badly furnished was the head of this particular prisoner they would have appended a rider to their verdict; but, unhappily, no one informed them of the fact, so he was sentenced to five years of penal servitude, and the shock sent his weak brain reeling. His case and mine are two good examples of the different way the same thing may affect two different orders of intellect. As far as I was concerned, those months of solitude had done me good, for they threw me into an artificial trance, wherein sensation was blunted for a while, and my soul relieved of its anguish. With Miffy it was the reverse. Originally foolish and weak, he dwindled, during the period of his solitary probation, into something closely resembling an idiot; for isolation cast a veil over his mind, from which it was impossible that he ever could recover. To most of my fellow-prisoners, I perceived, the stillness of probation-time was irksome and exasperating. The tendency of solitary confinement is to turn the thoughts inward; and whilst some of these men among whom I walked could boast of but little power of thought at all, the inner lives and aspira-

tions of others were not edifying subjects for continual scrutiny. Such work as is done in close-prisons (or prisons where men pass through their nine months of first probation) is all of an indoor and sedentary description; and this in itself has a wearing effect upon such as are accustomed to live in the open air. Solitude, too, is an awful monster for a vacant-minded person to fight hand to hand. How many men were there plodding round that circle who would find comfort or pleasure in remembering green trees or hawthorn dells, or in listening to Nature's voice? To most of them earth was but accumulated matter; the elfin forms of vapour mere fog, to be combated by drink. Being accustomed to live much out of doors, they missed the warmth of the sunshine, the fillip of the wind; but beyond the mere external pleasures which Mother Earth provides for her offspring—brute as well as human—they knew none of her delights. Her lore was a sealed book to them; her portfolio of pictures locked out of reach; her voice inaudible. Their fretful desires being condensed into a longing for freedom in order to work mischief, it is not

surprising that solitude should be a dragon. And these were the men with whom I was to consort! Ah me, how grim a prospect! The first effect of enforced solitude is to cow the uneducated mind; the second, to induce restlessness. The prospect of four white walls will subdue for a time even the extremely desperate. It is a gruesome thing when one wishes to be unruly to have no admiring audience. How different was the case with me, who pictured my little cell as the threshold of the tomb, where I was to wait until it shrank into a small long box! Some of these creatures who trotted round and round were so worried and so restless that they appeared to my imagination in the light of panthers. There was a dreadful fawning manner common to almost all. Cowed and subdued as they were, they had a way of sidling and smirking in cur-dog fashion before the master who held the stick. The latent irritation of the chained-up animal was there conspicuous in each line and feature, but it was veneered over with grovelling submission, made of lies and hate and treachery and spite, tight curbed, which was inexpressibly horrible to

witness. After watching the promenading party for the hour which was devoted to exercise, I always returned to my cell with a humiliating impression on my mind of men who smile whilst they stab you in the back ; of couchant feline creatures, waiting to catch you at a disadvantage ; of slimy, filthy reptiles crawling, half hidden, in the grass.

And yet they were, one and all, more popular than I. It was an accepted fact that I was morose, simply because I never spoke. If I was ordered to do anything I did it dumbly, to the best of my ability. The Helot's only appanage was the dignity of silence, and this was an unfathomable riddle to the gay young warders.

Everything comes to an end, and the period of our separate confinement followed the inexorable law. The moment arrived at last when I was really to commence my new existence, to assume my new identity. Hitherto I had lingered in a sort of Purgatory ; now I was to descend into Hades. When the principal warder bade me resign my needles and prepare to herd in association with fellow-reprobates, I was seized by a

great dread, and looked anxiously from one to the other of the little knot who were already assembled in the hall. These, then, were a few of the rascals with whom I was to become intimate—with what result as regarded my future state? This was the party with which I was to travel to some distant penal establishment, a party of a dozen or so, from whose faces all that was good seemed banished. First there was Soda, in whose visage low cunning took the place of intellect, a cunning which was more akin to the evil instinct of a lower animal than the guiding reason of man. His jaw was square and massive; his upper lip was long; his nose short and puffed. His eyes were dull and glassy, and, half concealed as they were by swollen lids, they gave to his general expression a slow look of doggedness. His narrow brow was without a wrinkle; his stubbly pate receded in a cone. When his thick moist mobile lips parted in a smile, they displayed a sharp, white-pointed tooth like a tusk on either side. Mr. George Virgin resembled in nowise the blue-chinned, broken-nosed ruffian so well portrayed by

Cruikshank. His face was soft and round and sodden, like the sun with an attack of bile, or an exceedingly ill-made crumpet. A good specimen, however, of the cruel, sneaking, heartless bully was Mr. George Virgin, alias Soda, and his aspect now was rendered all the more repulsive by the submissive leer he had assumed in preparation for our parting with the governor. Miffy, the unfortunate postmaster, was also standing there, weak-visaged, slouching, apathetic ; and Jaggs, the 'man of many laggings,' who stood in a studied attitude of grace with a wonderful expression on his hatchet-features, as of a lantern-jawed child who has been naughty, and who is just on the point of giving way to howls.



CHAPTER V.

ON THE ROAD.



DARTMOOR was our destination ; to the relief of Jaggs and other old hands, who had a lively dread of Chatham.

We travelled all day, and found the early twilight of winter closing in when we alighted on the platform of Tavistock. The wind howled dismally through the open ends of the station, and we huddled closely together for warmth, as we awaited the arrival of the omnibus which was to take us on to Princetown, whiling away the time with song and anecdote and jest, and reminiscences of past glories. Though we numbered at least a dozen, and some of us were conspicuous for strength of sinew, two warders were sufficient

to guard the party ; for were we not carefully chained together, handcuffed, and strung on a steel cable ? There was no fear of our attempting to abscond ; and so, as discipline is necessarily relaxed upon a journey, our guardians left us alone, and stood conversing apart by themselves.

All my faculties were on the *qui vive*, in order to realise the kind of people amongst whom my future life was to be spent. Soda, who throughout the journey had been pre-occupied, intent, apparently, upon the solution of some knotty problem which it required all his small brains to master, woke up and nudged me in the ribs, commencing at the same time, for my delectation, as I appeared low and out of sorts, a perfect coruscation of encouraging nods and winks. To begin with, it was rather disconcerting to find myself in the good graces of this ruffian. What could I have done to win his suffrages ? There was no doubt that he was making up to me. Be the causes what they might, he was at great pains to amuse me by a series of elephantine gambols, executing cellar-flap steps for my behoof, cracking lewd jokes with

a stentorian heehaw like a donkey's bray, bawling scraps of such ditties as fairly set the little hair I had on end ; at the same time displaying his scorn for patient Miffy by kicks upon the shins, and for the simple Jaggs by elaborate pantomime, topping up the exhibition by weird gurgles in his throat, and an upturning of the eyes till you saw nothing but their yellows. I had had some conversation with Miffy in the train, and he spoke of the home from which he had been torn with a quiet pathos which awakened an answering chord in my breast. He had a wife whom he dearly loved, he told me, and three or four young children on whom he doted. How were they to live during their father's incarceration? A period of five years is a long time for a fatherless family to battle through, he sighed ; and while I pitied, I could not forbear smiling at him, for at the best he was but a feeble breadwinner to cater for so many. But his wife, it appeared, was consumptive— weaker even than he, and unable to take care of herself, much less of her children. And this caused my thoughts to wander to my own child. Thank heaven, her mother was

fully capable of wielding the household sceptre—too capable, indeed—for had she not constantly been setting up her authority against my own? There was no fear of that household up at Hampstead coming to shipwreck through my disappearance. They would get on well enough without me, alas! and forget me very soon, no doubt, and be very happy. I sincerely hoped that it might be so, whilst beset with fitful uneasiness on Mildred's account. If only I could know that her mother would be kind! But how idle were such thoughts as these. Were not real, present miseries enough, without inventing future ones, over which I could have no control? I should never know—could never know—how the future of my darling was to be shaped. To turn my mind into a less unpleasant channel, I went on with the survey of my fellow-prisoners.

Jaggs was evidently of a superior order to the rest, and yet I mistrusted him from the first. Craft was indelibly impressed in each groove of his lantern-jaws, selfishness in each pale blue eye. He had a way of examining you by stealth, out of the corners of his eyes,

when he thought you were not looking ; and then of staring upwards and beginning to whistle, as if absorbed in the contemplation of the heavens, which was not suggestive of an open disposition. But, if cold-blooded and full of artifice, Jaggs was lively and entertaining, and just now was in great spirits and inclined to be talkative. He seemed to breathe more freely as he approached the scene of former labours, and did the honours of the landscape, as the omnibus crawled over the moor, with the benignant air of protection wherewith one who has bought experience may condescend to instruct a neophyte.

‘I perceive you are a gentleman,’ he observed, with a smirk. ‘So am I. And a bit of an artist? In my modest way, so am I too. Ah ! you’ll find Dartmoor beautiful in summer, but not so pleasant this time of year. Grand cloud-shadows on the purple moorland. The fogs, too, have a picturesque aspect of their own. The prisoners like them better than the officers do, because when the mists rise there’s no outdoor labour on the works. A lovely country, though perhaps a trifle

lonely. The hotel we stop at isn't quite so nice.'

'You've been here before, then?' I inquired, with caution; for in the society of which henceforth I was to form one, it is not etiquette to refer to the past unless encouraged.

'Oh dear, yes! and shall again, no doubt,' replied the airy creature. 'And again and again, and yet again. It's my fate, and I can't help it. What one man may do another mayn't, you know. Once upon a time I was a clerk, holding quite a distinguished place of trust in the city; and being of a too confiding nature, I thought I might do with impunity, in a small way, what my employers did on a large scale. But you see I was mistaken. "One person may steal a horse, whilst another mustn't look over the hedge"—trite old proverb, but sadly true. Yes! I was mistaken. I am always being mistaken, somehow. How can I help that? What my superiors were pleased to call *financing*, was, in my humble sphere, dubbed *felony*. Odd, wasn't it? Can't make it out, and never shall, I suppose. It's a rum world. Look at the woodcocks

flying across the open ! Lots of 'em about here, but they never give us any at our hotel.'

'The soup's jolly good,' put in Soda, who always became attentive when the commissariat department was discussed. 'Only they're so devilish stingy over it, hang 'em ! and the keen wind makes a chap peckish. Here, you !' he cried out to Miffy, whose calm, weak face, down which soft tears were trickling, had the effect of exasperating his neighbour ; 'sit a bit further that way, will you, instead of crowding up so close, or I'll give you summat you won't like.'

Miffy, with scared eyes, moved as far from the burly ruffian as his place on the chain would permit, and Jaggs, to keep matters smooth, went on with a pleasant nod :

'You are a "lifer," I perceive, by the badge on your arm. Rather annoying to be a lifer. I've only twelve, you will observe ; but I shall try to get off as much of it as possible—winning my remission, that is—by punctual attention to business. It was cruel to give me so much. If their laws are

too intricate for my mind to grasp, it's not my fault, but the law's fault, I say, and the law ought to be altered and made plainer. But there, there! it's no use in being cross over one's misfortunes. I must wriggle into some snug berth, and make the best of it. The time will pass, and then I shall grow my hair and come out, and be sent back again, I dare say, before I've had occasion to call on Truefitt even once. One can't control events. If the world has conventions which I am too simple or too confused to follow, *que voulez-vous?* Excuse the foreign lingo; it's an old habit.'

The omnibus having by this time arrived at the bottom of a steep hill, we were allowed to get out and stretch our legs; and Mr. Virgin amused himself by treading heavily on the heels of the postmaster, who was in front of him upon the chain, and giving him vicious pinches.

'What a brute that is!' I exclaimed involuntarily, to which Jaggs replied, in a confidential whisper:

'Ah! there you've hit it. The worst of these hotels is the company. He's got twenty

years to do, he has ; so I may have to put up with him all the while I'm here. I know him well, and could tell you a thing or two. We were at Chatham together—that accursed hole !—and Soda was always in a bobbery himself, dressed either in black or yellow, and leading innocent young things like me into a mess as well. A shocking character, enough to make gentlemen like us feel sick. I say, isn't it a wonderful thing, though, how soon we get accustomed to a nuisance ? I've known people go wild at sound of church-bells, and get so used to 'em in a week or two, as not even to know when they ring. I take it that if it wasn't for something of that sort, you long-sentence men would go clean out of your senses. Yes, we get used to anything, and a nuisance endured long enough ceases to be a nuisance. I remember reading somewhere (we do a power of reading in the hotel) about the execution of the Cato Street conspirators. When the first head was held up, all the people shuddered and looked away ; but when the headsman held up the sixth they laughed ; and when he dropped the seventh, he was greeted with cat-calls and hoots of "Now,

then, clumsy!" What's he in for? For robbery with violence, I suppose, as usual. Knocking down women and bolting with their watches. Cowards of his stamp are always coming in for that. We'll draw him out presently, if you like; or I'll tell you what I know of his story, for there won't be much consecutive palaver, except on Sunday, when we get up to the hotel. He began, I believe, as a gutter-snipe, kicking about the streets. Idleness and drink have been the ruin of him. Though he's a bully, and therefore a coward, yet his hatred of labour is greater than his cowardice; for he's tried once or twice to mutilate himself in order to avoid doing any work. There are no end to his dodges. He's "played the balmy," pretending to be insane, you know; squatting on all fours, and barking like a dog; but somehow they always found him out. He tried to blind himself, to put his leg under a waggon, every sort of earthly thing to escape labour. I don't care about doing work myself, but I would not go the lengths of some of these chaps who have passed through reformatories. There! I hate the word. It's

men of this stamp that they turn out. They shut up a parcel of boys together, under care of an old granny who can't manage them ; boys who know too much, and want the stick, and who, boxed up together, complete each other's education in crime. A reformatory, managed as it is now, is an apprenticeship for the hotel—nothing more nor less. And it's very considerate of the authorities, for by this means they let the lads down gently ; acclimatise them, as it were, so that by easy stages they come not to mind prison a bit. And it's them as are always getting into scrapes, and getting reported and kicking up a dust, and making griffins of the governors, who, if things went smooth, would take things more easy. Hi ! Soda ! how did you like Chatham ?

The ruffian turned his bullet-head slowly, and, for all reply, scraped his handcuffs down Miffy's spine till the wretched postmaster cried out with pain.

'It is an awful place, and no mistake !' laughed Jaggs. 'That *was* work, though I was lucky enough to get out of it. They're excavating basins there, and huge docks.

Men stand on wooden platforms six-deep, one below the other, the lowest up to the waist in a black stinking ooze, which is handed up in baskets. They wear long boots, but bless you, they can't keep it out; and the upward movement strains every muscle. The hardest labour at Dartmoor is gentlemanly leisure in comparison. You don't mind being quodded, do you, Soda, provided it isn't Chatham?

Mr. Virgin, looking round, gave a slow wink with each heavy eyelid, and grunted :

'Devil a bit. Leastways, I wouldn't, if they didn't try to make a locomotive of me. But then, you see they won't let a man be, rot 'em !—and then I goes off my nut, and all the fat's in the fire. Mind it ! why should I ? The place is warm, and has lots of gaslight, and good clothes, and jolly blankets and a mattress ; and the food, except of a Sabbath, is none so dusty—better than I could get if out on the square. A chap gets accustomed to do without drink ; there are ever so many ways of getting baccy ; while, as for horse-pital, there's beef-tea and sponge-cakes, and cod-liver oil—lovely ! The square—oh my !'

The contemplation of 'the square' found so little favour in the eyes of Mr. Virgin, that he opened wide a cavernous mouth to draw out the last word with splendid scorn. When it was possible to obtain, by wandering from the paths of virtue, all the advantages which were unattainable for a man in his condition of life who chose to follow the straight road, was it to be wondered at that he, who had matriculated in a reformatory, should condemn the folly of those who are silly enough to be poor and also honest? Hard labour was a bugbear, no doubt; yet many are the sturdy ruffians who succeed in evading it. The doctor oftentimes dares not do his duty for fear of affronting the susceptibility of the anxious public, who knows nothing of the convict's ingenious stratagems, and is gulled with a too fatal facility. A man such as Soda was would try all kinds of ruses on the doctor. If he was successful and got into 'the farm,' well and good; he would be content mildly to lap his cod-liver oil twice a day, and sit quietly with others of his kidney by the side of a comfortable stove. If, on the other hand, the doctor saw through him, then the crooked-

ness of his nature would come into play—a crookedness which was apt to meander, simply for crookedness' sake. He would fly out; undergo punishment on punishment, being rendered more wild and wicked and unmanageable by each one; and be relegated at last as hopeless to the special gang of extreme evil-doers which was surrounded by a queer glamour of heroism. What a singular gang was the special party, and what unlikely people got drafted into it sometimes! Men with uncontrollable tempers; men whose crookedness took the form of exaggerated villany rather than of direct lunacy—men whose brains had been set awry by a casual blow on the pate, long since forgotten and healed. Some, and these were few, were driven into the gang by despair; some again by sheer bravado—and this last contingent had numbered Mr. Soda in its ranks. It is said that we all have a tile off; this, and a good-sized one, was Soda's tile. As Jaggs had told me, horror of work had stirred the scamp to doughty deeds, the latter year of his last sentence being altogether spent in the special gang. There are limits to bread

and water; each scoundrel encouraged his fellow; less hardened criminals stared with a species of awe at the band of desperadoes as it passed, which was in itself an indirect form of flattery. With members of that gang the governor was powerless. He was not allowed to flog them so long as they abstained from assault or self-mutilation, and for men who have lashed themselves into the delirium of utter recklessness there is no efficacious medicine but 'the CAT.'

But hopes of hoodwinking the 'croker' this bout made Soda amiable and also communicative. He elected *pro tem.* to exhibit his least unpleasant side, and merely indulged in an encouraging double-shuffle when I observed, sighing, that the system weighed unequally on individuals—that what to him were luxuries worthy of attainment, were to me the most vulgar description of necessities; that I was destined, as it appeared, to undergo refinements of torture, which, to a man like him, were as Hebrew. This inexperienced and incomplete view of matters roused the festive Jaggs to fresh ebullitions of delight,

and he set himself forthwith still further to instruct the neophyte.

‘ Bless your innocent soul !’ he cried, ‘ the system works much more unequally than that. When convicts are sent to Public Works as we are now, after their *separates* are over, it’s understood that for a year at least—maybe two or three—they are put to genuine drudgery, regardless of antecedents, before being allowed to learn a trade. They must do navy-work—or stone-quarrying, or brick-making, or whatever’s the particular prison’s specialty; and if they behave themselves while their backs are being broke they’re drafted off by-and-by into the shoemakers’ or tailors’ party, unless they’re lucky enough to make friends with the authorities, and win a privilege. The only escape from this is in consequence of weak health or bodily infirmity ; so the first thing to be done by a man who knows what’s what, is to get round the *medico*. But everyone, you see, can’t do that, or the heavy labour would never get done at all, and then there’d be a row up at the Home Office. You, for instance, with that chest of yours and those calves, are

bound to go quarrying unless you can show that you have heart-disease. I don't mean the genuine article—that's not likely—but can you put it on? No! of course not. A gentleman like you or me is lamentably ignorant of dodges, and goes to the wall, until, driven by necessity he learns 'em. You're put to digging, we'll say, like they do at Chatham or Wormwood Scrubbs, varied with a little cheerful barrow-trundling up an inclined plane. You've never done a day's hard work in all your life, but you're game and try your best. In a week or two you break down and have to go to hospital till you get your second wind, as I might say; then you go back again and drudge, drudge, till you wish the sky would fall and finish you. That's the way with the gentleman-lag, poor devil! but he's the exception. Now, if you look over a prison list you'll see that as a rule quite half its inmates were originally labourers. When they come into the hotel, therefore, they only resume what they've been accustomed to do outside, so it's no special hardship. And we can trace this inequality of punishment further yet. In all Public Works prisous there's a demand for goo

carpenters, blacksmiths, what-not—to guide the young hands and get the work ship-shape. Convicts who were originally blacksmiths or carpenters, and really understand the business, don't hide their light under a bushel I can tell you; so that they are pretty certain to leave a digging-party before you, for instance, who are a useless bit of goods, being a gentleman. Then they, like the labourers, drop into the groove they were in outside. For them, *actual punishment ceases* from that moment, so far as the unusually hard labour is concerned, which was part of their sentence; and in many cases they are even better off than they were before, for though they don't get pay they are relieved from care, are well-housed, fed, warmed, clothed, and so forth; and are not expected to work so many hours as they would have to, if earning wages. It's a dismal look-out, my poor chap; but you seem smart enough, and will pick up useful wrinkles in no time.'

It was a dismal look-out, I was fain to admit; and yet I felt that strong exercise would do me good, if only it could be done

in less execrable company. But what is the use of 'if'?

Visions of my future, as of my present, were to be banished at any price; so, to distract my thoughts, I began to cross-question Soda, who, being in a condescending mood, answered readily. Had he known the influence of the country, I asked, when quite young? Yes, in a way. His early childhood had been passed at Manchester, in a slum entitled the 'Green Rest,' an oasis of rank verdure, overshadowed by tall chimneys, rendered noisy by the whirr of factories. Two or three weakly trees which put forth a few leaves each year, just to show that they were not quite dead, gave a rustic air to the enclosure; while as for shade, was there not always a quantity of ragged linen—mysterious specimens of female underclothing—fluttering from strings between poles? These were the limits of his rustic knowledge.

At a tender age he was removed by his mother from this enchanting spot to the purlieus of Drury Lane, which suited well both with his proclivities and hers. She was killed in a night-brawl, and buried by

the parish. Then he found his way to a reformatory, where, accustomed as he had always been to be sworn at and have his ears boxed, he could not at first comprehend the indulgent treatment he received. When he was a bad boy, which was often, instead of being soundly whipped he was lectured and put to bed; and when in bed enjoyed the companionship of a neighbour who was ten times less well-behaved than himself. When he left the reformatory he was more than half a man, was armed with valuable receipts wherewithal to obtain cash without working for it; had been taught a series of addresses where useful things were to be bought; had become an adept in the virtues of the skeleton-key, and had made numerous valuable acquaintances whose parents were only too ready to put a polish on his education. At this point he fell in love, as everybody will some time or other, even such slow-brained knaves as this one was. He secured the young affections of one Blackbeetle Bet, an uncomely damsel who, singularly enough, was an honest girl, and who strove with all her might and main to wipe from her un-

gainly lover the evil effects of his early training. She did not aspire to marriage—what should such as she have to do with Holy Sacraments? But she was faithful to her brutal lover, in spite of kicks and blows, with so sublime an unselfish love as surely must have gone far to condone her own shortcomings. In his way the young ruffian liked her, better indeed than anybody in the wide world except himself; and felt a singular feeling come over him when he was marched off on a first sentence of penal servitude, and beheld Bet weeping in the court as if her heart would break. At the end of his first term the faithful lass was waiting for him, with hollow cheeks and dark rings about those eyes which had gained for her the sobriquet of 'Blackbeetle,' but with a glad smile of welcome nevertheless. She had kept soul and body together by working at a dangerous trade which was undermining her health. But no matter; her 'old man' was free again, would turn over a new leaf and work for her, who was so true and faithful, and for himself. There was a difficulty about this, for the discharged prisoners' aid societies are able to

do little that is practical. The virtuous public who waxes sentimental as to the treatment of convicts when in durance, sternly declines, when they are set free, to raise a finger towards assisting them to be honest.

Soda couldn't get work ; indeed he did not try very much : but at last, cajoled and teased by Bet's importunities, he assumed the proud profession of a ' doll's eye polisher,' which, if light and easy, was unhappily not lucrative, and which he exchanged later on for that of a furbisher of such human optics as had become temporarily disfigured by stray fists.

This was unfortunate, for gentlemen who get black eyes in brawls are not good company for youths who have graduated in the atmosphere of reformatories. Soda went wrong again. All Bet's efforts could not keep him straight. He had his head cropped for the second time ; went wild in prison, attempted to break out, behaved like a savage. Why ? Because news came to him that Bet was dead. She had died deliberately ; not by her own hand exactly, but by her own act. She was too proud for vulgar suicide, and

yet firmly resolved to die. Weary of life, she had returned to her old dangerous trade, had worked resolutely at it day after day, avoiding the mask which was supplied to mitigate the effects of noxious fumes, and so died by inches, biting her counterpane at night in agony, but pulling herself together in the morning to re-enter the chamber of death.

The dull brain of the convict took in the fact by degrees that the slender string which made freedom comfortable was snapped, that henceforth the world could be nothing to him but an enemy ; and from the moment he realised the fact he gave up all thought of winning any remission of his sentence. Idleness had more charms than liberty ; he cared not how many marks he lost ; applied all the arts at his command to the circumventing of his keepers, and came little by little to glory in the extent of his iniquity, to wallow more and more deeply in his shame.

Thus the vanity which forms a large part of all small natures found food, in this man's case, in the enjoyment of the admiration of fellow-criminals. The one soft oasis in his

heart—the spot occupied by Blackbeetle Bet—grew hard while he was at Chatham. He stabbed a warder there to satisfy the collective hatred of his gang, tried to strangle a fellow-prisoner to whom he had never spoken, because he thought that his renown as arch-ruffian was paling, and needed a little rubbing up. The fourteen years of his second sentence passed ; he was set free, only to be brought back in a few weeks, and this time was condemned to twenty.

Part of all this he told me himself, part I learned from Jaggs in whispers ; and as I turned it over, the cruelty of my own fate came home to me in yet more vivid colours. This villain, who had proved himself incorrigible, was, under any circumstances, to be set free in twenty years ; he whose mind was of the lowest type, and who had been blunted besides by the vicissitudes of his career.

I, on the other hand, who had been guilty of one crime in a moment of mad rage, was possibly—only possibly, mind—to have my case considered in twenty years, if my behaviour was consistently angelic ; and I was

placed at the same time in a predicament which must sorely try a temper as irascible as mine. In spite of all his enormities, Soda would be free some day, though he did not seem to care for freedom, whilst I should be compelled to drag my chain unto the end in the company of the degraded and the vile.



CHAPTER VI.

PUBLIC WORKS.



we jolted along that rough, endless road, crawling constantly uphill over a succession of dreary waves which loomed dim and gigantic in the gathering mist, my heart died within me. 'That's the gentleman-lag, poor devil!' Jaggs had said, and the phrase rung ominously in my ears. To what a ghastly banishment was I being conducted. It appeared now to my heated imagination as if, spell-bound by a malevolent fairy, I was being conducted to some enchanted desert, to abide there with the spirits of the damned. The undulations of the vast moor, whose ironbound tracts of earth and huge granite boulders capped with drifts of snow, seemed like a frozen ocean

crowned by seething foam, stretched into space, measureless and without limit. In the tiny cell at Pentonville, I had felt as though buried alive. This was the other extreme. Here, on the ruins of a shattered globe, I lingered—the Last Man. The world had come to an end. The righteous had gone out of sight—away somewhere in æther—to their Father. The wicked, as disembodied ghosts, were condemned to walk in chaos; and I, weak, stumbling, sinning mortal, was the only living thing that had been forgotten. How long was the ordeal to last—how long the grinding martyrdom? When would an angel, speeding through space upon some mission, perceive the one neglected speck? When, shriven—my sin condoned—might I too soar heavenward, or, doomed for ever, be freed from suspense at least, and be reduced to a like condition with the rest?

Soda's spirits being somewhat damped by the visions of retrospect which my questions conjured up, was crowing a comforting ditty about the Governor of Portland, in which blasphemy and filth were deftly mingled, and was assisted at intervals by the whole strength

of an appreciative company, who yelled and howled the chorus. What a devil's sabbath! In vain the warders endeavoured to keep order. It was an understood thing that discipline was to be relaxed; so their remonstrances were merely a form. My first impression of my new comrades sickened my soul. With groans but half suppressed, I withdrew into my corner and buried my face in my hands, marvelling how long I could put up with them.

What a relief it was when somebody cried out that we had almost reached our destination! The journey had seemed interminable—the weary travail of a lifetime. Rugged track and heath and jutting boulder; no dwelling visible for miles. A change at last, thank goodness! Any change were welcome. A turn of the road brought us to a watch-tower, capped by a semaphore—a small white building on the right-hand side like a lighthouse. On the left, down below in the centre of the darkling plain, I could perceive a black group of houses, from the midst of which rose a vast building, studded with tiers of windows brilliantly illumined.

At sight of it, Soda gave a grunt, and Jaggs a crow of recognition. The spirits of the latter were little short of marvellous. The man really appeared glad to be returning to a familiar place of sojourn. The grim silence and intense solitude of the settlement—the tall, gaunt barrack whose roof was pale with rime; the long white threads of road stretching into nothingness, without a vestige of anything alive, to say nothing of anything human, travelling on them, formed a picture of desolation which thrilled my impressionable nature. This dreary heath was to be my dwelling-place, that frightful building was to be my future home till the moment of release should come, when I was to be moved to the other one below ground.

We passed the outlying habitations—the cottages of the warders, the houses of the Government officials, each with its melancholy garden, each dwelling built of dismal granite, faced and adorned with black (as though not sad-looking enough already—in mourning perhaps, as a penal settlement should be), and rattled under a heavy stone gateway into the inner yard. Great was the confusion which

reigned there; the hubbub of voices, the twinkling of lanterns moving to and fro; for another detachment of wild animals had but just arrived before us—a body sent from Brixton by way of Plymouth; and this second party was no less inclined to be frolicsome than was our own. Now it is the custom at Dartmoor for fresh arrivals (so soon as they have been identified and handed over to their new guardians) to be bundled into the punishment-cells till they can be conveniently sorted and set each to his allotted task. Before he can be told off to a particular company, each convict must be examined by the doctor, and on the occasion of a rush of new-comers such as the present, this must perforce be a matter of time. Ever since leaving Pentonville, the sluggish brain of Soda had been groping about in the byways of a scheme whereby he was to circumvent his keepers, and the chance of the party from Brixton arriving simultaneously with ours, made the realisation of his project all the more easy. No sooner, therefore, was he consigned (sitting on a form) to the care of a warder, than he leaned heavily on him for

support, and, declining food, sank on the floor of his cell, vowing that his pore legs were woful bad, and that it was very hard that he could not see the 'croker' till the morrow. What's the use of doctors, he peevishly inquired, if they can't attend to a pore man when wanted? Was he in pain? the warder asked. If he were, why then—— Oh no! he was not in actual pain, was Soda's quick rejoinder, but it was very hard, for all that; and I was wondering what was to be the upshot of this comedy, when my attention was withdrawn to another one which was being enacted hard by.

The chief warder of Dartmoor at this period was Mr. Scarraweg, who, in his way, was quite a character. He had the manners and the gruffness of a sea-dog, as well as the underlying kindness of heart. As a sailor, he had won medals and no little honour in the Crimea and elsewhere, and was proud of displaying his baubles on highdays and holidays. Imposing was his appearance when a Director came down from town; but, if a Special Commissioner threatened to arrive, then did he blossom forth glorious indeed.

He was stern of demeanour, liable to explosions of wrath, which he denominated 'tantrums,' fiery whirls which passed away like tropical showers. He brooked no liberties, either from subordinates or criminals, and yet he was liked and respected by one and all. Many an opportune kindness have I known him to do whilst growling and frowning and blustering. His bark, as is frequently the case with sea-dogs, was worse than his bite ; but his teeth were sharp for all that, as many a transgressor learned to his cost as well as to his surprise.

As we know already, Mr. Jaggs and Mr. Scarraweg were old acquaintances. The transcendent gentility of the guileless prisoner had not been without its awing effect upon the chief warder when first he was committed to his care ; but little by little he had found him out (a seafaring chief warder is a centaur, half openness, half craft) and many a noisy, if bloodless, passage of arms had taken place between the combatants previous to the last exit upon license of Mr. Jaggs. The final skirmish must have been terrible, for all the fangs of the sea-dog were

bared down to the gums while his skipping antagonist was grievously overweighted by his gyves. In the desperate game, Mr. Scarraweg held all the trumps. What cleverness was needed to contest the unequal battle! I declare that the sparring match between these two must have been awful to witness. What a pity that there was no reporter to record the rounds! That little squabble between St. George and the Dragon was nothing to it. In this instance the dragon triumphed, but St. George was too doughty to admit that he was vanquished. When he sallied out of prison the tide of advantage turned. Then he was free—more free than the hated Scarraweg, who, as warder of a prison, was not free at all. The marine monster was tied by the leg (if marine monsters may, for the sake of argument, be supposed to possess such appendages); whilst St. George, relieved of his harness, could be as agile as he pleased, tripping hither and thither, with here a deft thrust and there an aggravating poke of his cruel lance, while the labouring dragon plunged and blundered.

His ticket-of-leave or license being care-

fully pocketed, Mr. Jaggs revolved plot after plot, and sought high and low for the best means of revenging himself upon his enemy. Oh for some subtle revenge, which, despite close-fitting scales, should penetrate to a vital part! He who seeks earnestly is pretty sure to find. By seeking earnestly, Mr. Jaggs found, and there can be no denying that his scheme was an ingenious one. In London, launched for a third time on a perilous career, it was necessary to assume an alias. What better plan than to take the name—humble but unspotted—of the detested foe, and drag it through the mire of the police-court? Excellent! Brought in due course before the beak, the guileless Jaggs had bleated out that he was an innocent, a victim to lying appearances; that it was impossible on the face of it, for the own nephew of the respected chief warder of Dartmoor (son of his only sister) to have been guilty of the three card trick. It was true that he had been a bit wild, had consorted with betting men, who, far from being confederates, had fleeced him of his little all; and on that account it was that his dear uncle—his sainted

mother's only brother—had thought fit to deny him any help. But is not blood thicker than water? If his worship would only be lenient with the misguided nephew, the recalcitrant uncle would certainly come round, and then how happy everybody would be, and they would all (so promised the artless nephew) join in a family group to bless the benignant magistrate. But as it happened, both detectives from Whitehall and warders from Millbank identified the prisoner as Jaggs—the notorious, irreclaimable Jaggs—the man of many laggings. Yet that fertile and inimitable creature spoke so plausibly, shed such genuine tears, showed glimpses of an inner being so racked by anxiety, that the authorities were for a moment staggered, mindful of certain deplorable miscarriages of justice due to mistaken identity. The unruffled prisoner swore stoutly that he was Scarraweg, despite the evidence of the detectives. Sure no guilty liar could simulate the truth so well. He was remanded for inquiry, and when brought forth again to face the indignant repudiation of the chief warder, who obtained

special leave of absence on purpose, merely smiled and nodded, with a careless allusion to the cruelty of a certain celebrated uncle, whose behaviour was far from exemplary to his nephew and niece in the wood.

At Pentonville (whilst undergoing *separates* on his third sentence) he poured into the chaplain's bosom a harrowing recital of his relation's perfidy, who might, he declared, if gifted with any bowels at all, have saved an erring relative instead of denouncing him as a notorious felon. But what can you expect of a chief warder? Had the chaplain ever known one who had bowels? Of course not. Bowels of compassion are denied to the hard men whose mission it is to coerce the unfortunate. And the ingenious Jaggs stared with such subtle meaning at the chaplain's waistcoat (as though on a desperate quest after bowels), that the latter fairly lost countenance and, disturbed by accusing rumblings, set down the chief warder as a brute.

The joke at that stage was a fair one; but the frolicsome Jaggs intended to gain from its development still more fun and more

revenge. It would be exquisitely funny to return to Dartmoor ; to beard the cock upon his own dunghill ; to complain to all the warders of the cruelty of his own mother's brother, and at the same time by exemplary conduct to tie his guardian's hands. One of the peculiar phases of Jaggs's character was the contented facility with which he could resign himself to the amenities of prison discipline. Of course he preferred his liberty, and babbled sometimes of champagne and oyster suppers, but somehow he seemed to find no difficulty when the time came round in bending again under the yoke. His cell was never dirty ; his tailor's work was always neat ; being slim and slight of figure and pale of visage, he had always managed to cajole the doctor in the matter of light labour. He avoided reports with a dexterity which was sublime. How could blunt, irascible Mr. Scarraweg retaliate ? If he struck out, his blows would only hit the air, for his watchful adversary would nimbly skip aside. He was too upright and too honest to descend to unjust accusations. Jaggs was aware of this, and in it lay his strength.

All along the way, then, Jaggs's spirits had been rising at the prospect of his reception at Dartmoor, and his expectation was by no means disappointed by the result, when upon the principal warder's lantern being raised to his face, he grinned at him and said, loud enough for all to hear :

‘Don't you know your poor nevy George, Uncle John? Though you were awful cruel, I bear no malice. Come, shake hands, and let's be friends.’

There was a pause of dismay ; then, the situation being really comic, the assistant warders tittered and the surrounding convicts roared. The unhappy chief glared for a moment at his torturer, then at the giggling crew ; checked rising choler and a torrent of oaths with superhuman effort (swearing on duty is a grave offence), and leaving the newcomers to be sorted anyhow, dashed his lantern to the ground and strode away to his sanctum in the dark.

His guileless foe had scored two and swallowed his bread and cocoa with relish, while his uncle sat growling in obscurity. What was to be done with such a rascal ?

If left unpunished he would contaminate the lot, and peace and order would be at an end. That would never do. It should never be said that the sea-dog had been discomfited by one of the wretches whom it was his duty to guard. Paltry St. George! His triumph should be short-lived; but how was he to be bowled over? Mr. Scarraweg racked his brains all night, and growled like a lion that is hungry; and, by dint of seeking, found, as Jaggs had done. For, stung by indignation, even the sea-dog could be ingenious. He knew (who better?) the proclivities of the swell-mobsman, for he had watched him in all his phases. Mr. Jaggs would certainly be up to some trick to avoid labour. Come what might of it, he should this time be sent to quarrying. No more tranquil days of snipping at bits of cloth for the arch-offender! He would assume a hollow cough when examined by the doctor, or spit blood, or swear he was on the brink of a consumption. But this time the doctor should be forewarned. He presumed to beard the sea-dog, did he? actually to flout him to his face? Oh, indeed! He laughs longest who laughs last. The guile-

less one would laugh on the wrong side of his mouth very shortly, or his enemy, Mr. Scarraweg, was much mistaken.

There was a grand sorting next day ; a scurrying of warders ; whilst the doctor was dishevelled and streamed with perspiration. The new-comers were docketed like parcels. When, on the third morning, things had resumed their pristine quiet, and I was ordered out of my cell to join my party, I confess that the spectacle which I beheld made me for an instant forget my sorrows.

Figure to yourself a large bare yard, situated between one of the wings or halls and the lofty outside wall (a granite barrier towering ever so high), with a big gate at either end of it. On some steps about the centre of the wall, the governor, a dapper little gentleman, with white moustache, well waxed and shaggy white eyebrows ; clad in a tight blue frock—every inch a gentleman. Hark ! what is that sound ? A faint, regular concussion on the frosty air—what is it ? A distant, regular tramp of many hundred feet, muffled by the thick snow upon the ground. Presently, through one of the gates defiles

a company of felons, a dozen or so, two and two, keeping exact step, with a warder at the rear, well-coated and gaitered, and bearing at his side a sword, who salutes with hand to cap, crying as he passes: 'No. 1 party; fourteen men, sir, all correct,' and takes his allotted station.

Another set follows, and yet another, and another, and another. '36 party; twenty men, sir; all correct!' 38 party; 39 party; and so on—a monotonous cry—a series of sharp shouts in the clear air like a rattle of musketry; and then the whole yard becomes closely packed by a dense array of crime—sallow, flap-eared, crop-headed, standing at attention, facing the dapper governor. What an army! There are young men there and old, pale and ruddy, dark and fair, short and tall, stout and thin, strong and feeble—mere boys with down upon the lip and hoary grizzled reprobates, to the number of a thousand and more. Heavens! what villanous rows of faces with stubbly chins! what hang-dog features and scowling brows, and cunning grins and vicious smirks, and great protruding ears and heavy jowls, and bullet pates!

Faces dull and yellow, and seamed and sunken like the dead ; faces round, fresh, pink, ingenuous ; faces from which hope has fled for ever. Stalwart, straight-backed knaves, fat senile tottering Silenuses ; cripples on crutches and on sticks. All marked with the same mystic unseen brand ; all wearing the same uniform—soiled fustian knickerbockers and gaiters, stout hobnailed boots, blue striped smocks over their jackets, and brown caps like Scotch bonnets on their heads.

There they stand in serried companies, for even the vast yard can scarcely hold them all—all of the same washed-out hue, as if cut from a single piece of faded discarded frippery, the same and yet so different. Red-nosed and scowling for the most part, their breath in the frost-laden atmosphere giving them the aspect of a myriad of furnaces, they stand waiting to be searched, under the eye of the autocrat, before proceeding to their daily work. What a forbidding assemblage of the sons of Cain, in whose breasts the sweltering lees of the heart lie garnered. ‘And am I like that?’ I thought with terror. ‘Am I just such another flap-eared, hang-dog, miserable

rascal? Of course I am, or I should not be here. O God! if my outer self is so transformed, why is not my inner part changed also? But was it not? Had you told me a year before that in twelve months I should become such as this, I should have said, 'Not so; I shall die first.' But I was not dead. Alas, alas! I was not dead, nor likely to succumb. To have endured what I had passed through and lived, I must be altered, grievously altered for the worse. And what would be the next change? how soon might I look for it? How long would it be before I should become one again—before the inner should come to match the outer self, which, thank heaven, I had no chance of seeing?

The discipline of the throng was amazing. So perfect was it that the whole machine could be moved with the little finger. No confusion now. Every unit was but a cog in a huge wheel, which revolved by the irresistible impulse of its own weight. The order with which the multitude went through its evolutions was so punctual and swift in its minuteness that a man could not cause delay, however much he might desire to be

obstructive. The wave passed over any petty attempt at obstruction, and swept quietly along—silent, unbrawling, brushing the resisting pebble on its course, to be swallowed up and lost in the broad smooth impulse of its torrent.

As the warder in charge of each party passed up and down the lines of his contingent, each man doffed his cap, unbuttoned his vest, stretched out both arms, in order that his guardian might pass his hands quickly up and down, to be sure that no forbidden articles were concealed about his person. The governor looked on approvingly, as company after company tramped through the farther gate and wheeled to right or left, either out into the open or away to a distant workshop, in obedience to a word.

Unconsciously, propelled by some hidden agency, I dropped into a vacant place, and found myself marching, with some thirty others, along the road by which we had arrived.

‘For what purpose?’ I turned and asked my neighbour, who was no other than Jaggs, the quondam volatile, but now the rueful

one, who muttered, with a sniff and wry grimace :

‘Quarrying, by the living Jingo ! That I should come to this—*I*, who have never done a stroke of labour all these years ! The croker refused to pass me—said I was wiry when I complained of being delicate. Wiry, indeed ! I’m a mere aspen. Cuss that old uncle of mine ! He’s scored one to my two. Hard labour ! What’ll become of my hands, I should like to know ? A sweetly pretty state of things for gentlefolks !’

‘Silence, there !’ bawled the guardian of the troop, as if we had been deaf. ‘Hold your infernal tongues—d’ye hear ?—unless you want bread and water !’

‘That I do—very badly,’ retorted Jaggs, with a poor attempt at jesting. ‘I shall want poultices for my precious mauleys. Here’s a go, and no mistake ;’ and he looked down with sorrowful anger at the filbert nails and satin skin and suspiciously mobile fingers, whose refined susceptibility and perfect condition twelve years of hard labour was little calculated to improve.

Many of our gang were old allies of

Jaggs's, and they exchanged notes of what had happened since last they met as we trudged along, whilst I gave way to reverie. That scene in the yard just now had brought home to me the full and crushing sense of my serfdom. This was worse than slavery, for slaves may to a certain extent be trusted; whilst, as for us, our every movement was watched with threatening suspicion by a lynx-eyed cordon of civil guards, who paced within sight of us, a short distance off, armed each with a loaded rifle. Then there was the watch-tower which had drawn my attention as we drove by, the white building like a lighthouse with the semaphore. This building commanded the plain where the bog-parties worked, and also the quarry whither we were bound; and all day long, from dawn to sunset, a guard was pacing there, his bayonet glistening in the sun — watching, watching. This was a new and galling form of the EYE, which used to stare through the Judas-hole at Pentonville. What else but despair can fall on a sensitive-minded man when he finds himself met at every turn by a surveillance as nimble as his thoughts,

as active as his imagination; and which, being carried out by many in rotation, may be said never to sleep? How fatiguing is the chain whose rattle never ceases! First comes a moment of unreasoning agony; then a numb feeling of hopelessness. There is nothing for it but to renounce resistance, and, without resignation, to submit.

On that first day in the quarry I got on better than I expected. The cold and the ozone in the air braced my nerves, while the exertion which was required to move some heavy stones set every muscle tingling. In order to forget the presence of the watchers, I worked with all my force; and thereby, as I soon perceived, won the bad opinion of the party, who objected to so malignant an example being set. Some murmured under their breath; one or two old reprobates openly declared they'd do for me if I didn't mend my manners. Decidedly I was in bad luck at the start, for even such unwonted diligence as mine failed to save me from the chiding of our guardian, a pompous young person of five-and-twenty or thereabouts, who was in huge delight at the opportunity

of displaying his importance. Because he saw, I suppose, that I was his superior, that young officer made a dead set at me. Nothing that I did was right. Although warders are specially instructed to be lenient with new-comers till their hands harden, he could not resist harrying 'the gentleman;' so that, what with annoyance from the guardian and what with my grumbling comrades, my prospects for the future were dark enough. I bit my lips and laboured till my back ached, and maintained a gloomy silence, for I was afraid to trust my tongue. Short temper had already produced dire misfortune, and it behoved me to cultivate caution, for an assault on an official means flogging with the cat; and I dreaded to contemplate what I might be goaded to do if reduced to that last stage of degradation. Oh, how that Jack-in-office tried me—overbearing, peachen-cheeked young puppy! There were moments when my fingers itched to clutch his throat, and batter in his empty head as, alas! I had battered in that other one; but by heaven's mercy I was enabled to control myself, to gulp down my indignation by force of will,

while the old lags curried favour with their guardian by jeering at my distress.

Jaggs was out of sorts and pensive by reason of his discomfiture by Mr. Scarraweg, and so was inclined to moralise and improve the occasion for my benefit. He kindly allowed me to do all the pushing—we were engaged together in the moving of a block—and lectured me the while like a fond parent.

‘You learn this to begin with, old pal,’ he said. ‘Whatever else you may do, never you lose your temper here. If you keep your temper they can’t touch you, and if they find you take no notice they’ll give up worriting as a bad job. That’s the first lesson. You’ll find that all old lags have the tempers of angels, and therefore are never reported. It’s the young or inexperienced chaps who are always in hot water, and why? Because they won’t remember that from the moment the prison gate closed on ’em, they ceased to be men. It’ll be nuts to that impudent young pump there to report you, for by doing so he’ll show that he’s a zealous officer and flatter his small vanity at

the same time. Think of yourself as having four legs instead of two—no, not as an animal, because an animal can kick. Think of yourself as a chair, placed here on purpose to be sat on. Chairs don't cry out, you know, when people flop on 'em.'

'They break sometimes,' I muttered, 'and let the sitter down upon his back.'

'No, they don't,' retorted Jaggs, 'not if they are well made; though some people are uncommon heavy, and wriggle about awful. Did I cry out when the doctor sent me quarrying? Not such an ass. It's the number one score of my cruel uncle. But I'll score another by-and-by, you'll see. Just you listen to me in chapel to-morrow, how I'll sing. Not that I've a voice, but that don't prevent a fellow from making a joyful noise. The parson 'll hear me and put me in the choir, which sits close to the reading-desk. Then I'll spit blood where he can't help seeing it, and when he asks me about it I'll say it's nothing, and that I wouldn't have him notice it for worlds; and then I'll spit more blood, and he'll expostulate with the croker in spite of me: and after that

I'll take to bookbinding, or something light and amusing of that kind, and complain all the while that I'd rather be in the open air. Obey the rules and keep your temper, and always complain, and always want something that you can't possibly get, and never under any circumstances be content. That's the way to get on in prison. Do you suppose I should have got on as well as I always have if I had had words with the warders? Certainly not. I would have made 'em spiteful. Do what you're bid, and complain about trifles. Last time I was here I was always crying out for tea when they gave me gruel, and gruel when they gave me tea, and I was always interviewing the governor for a change to something else; till at last they all grew so exasperated at the sight of me that I was allowed to fetch the farm—go into hospital, you know—where I stopped for the rest of my time, taking nice beef-tea and quinine wine for the good of my delicate constitution. How shall I spit blood? Nothing easier, and it doesn't do you much harm in the end. Finely-ground glass will work the oracle. Swallow it as you would grey powder, and

then by kneading the pit of your stomach you can always produce a little blood. Sharp fellow? Oh dear, no! As innocent as an unborn infant. See how brown I've been done by that old porpoise Scarraweg! Don't that look like an infant? It's humiliating, there! I had a pain in the region of the heart this morning—such a pain—I defy any one in the place to do it better; but the croker was primed, and wouldn't so much as look at me.

““Able-bodied man,” he says, scribbling in a book.

““Beg pardon, sir,” I answered, as civil as an M.P. in prospect; ‘but I’m that weak——”

““Bogwork on the moor, then,” he snaps: “ozone’s the best tonic;” and off I’m marched without any more palaver, while old Scarraweg grins over the croker’s shoulder, fit to burst his tunic.

““I shall die, sir, and you’ll have murdered me,” I says, as they trot me off. “Poor mother suffered agonies on my account, I was such a weak infant, and had to be brought up by hand. When I’m killed, sir, I hope you won’t feel remorse.” But it wasn’t

a bit of good with that old sailor there. Heartless wretches all ! It isn't the labour I mind so much '—I could not conceal a smile, for he had done absolutely nothing all the morning—'it's the humbling sensation of being done, and of being done when a chap like Soda has succeeded. A coarse, vulgar, stupid lout ! Yet his trick has answered, while I'm left out here in the cold. Is not that lowering to a fellow's self-respect ? What has he done ? Why, he's lost the use of his legs. The people who brought us here are gone back, and it's not worth while sending to Pentonville to inquire why "cripple" wasn't marked upon his record. If a man won't walk, he won't, any more than a horse 'll drink if disinclined. Anyway, that low blackguard has squared them somehow, for I saw him as we came by—with his tongue in his cheek as he caught sight of me—a crutch in one hand and a stick in t'other, hobbling off into the washus—one of the snugest berths—for all the world as if he'd been crippled from a babby !'



CHAPTER VII.

HARD LABOUR.



HE swell-mobsman-like glitter of sham gentility with which my mate veneered his impish cunning shocked the sense of right which had not yet entirely deserted me. The plausible infant who, guileless till bespattered by the world's slime, was clearly a martyr to circumstance, was not precisely the mentor whose apothegms I should have stored away, were I still the person who was dead. Placed as I was, however, clad in the semblance of the felon Anderson, there was much to be learnt from Mr. Jaggs. One who is called upon, when an adult, to shake off his mortal coil and don another form which is new and strange, finds himself actually in the condi-

tion that Jaggs was employing as a disguise. Though outwardly a man, he is a babe, without experience, without any of the thousand little invisible antennæ which to men of the world act as signals of warning. Jaggs was always talking for effect. You never could tell how much of what he said he really meant. He was a superb and stupendous sham, a magnificent fraud which you admired, though you were aware all the time that under the dazzling crust lurked dead men's bones. At this period—we were as yet no more than casual acquaintances—I would not have trusted my mate a yard beyond my ken. That cold, expressionless, fish-like eye of china-blue instinctively repelled confidence. As an optic, it was opaque as a stone wall. Look into that of a favourite hound. In its clear moist depths you can read a world of affection and of trust. Not so with the orb of Mr. Jaggs, which suggested fine porcelain, or rather choice enamel—smooth dry flint without a fissure or a blemish—but which had base metal for foundation. I knew all this ; yet Jaggs dazzled me in spite of myself, and from the point of view which

he disclosed to me, his words were pearls of wisdom. He was a Gamaliel at whose feet it behoved me to sit. My only chance of leading a life that was bearable—and fate had decreed that I must bear my life—lay in keeping a strict watch over myself. For peace-sake I must propitiate my keepers and my comrades. Unhappily, from my arrival at Dartmoor, things went wrong. Both prisoners and guardians are on principle equally suspicious of the ‘gentleman lag;’ the one class because ‘our betters’ are, of course, our hereditary foes; the other because refined persons in durance give more trouble, unless subdued at the outset, than a dozen hardened malefactors who accept their fate and make the best of it. The chief warden was suspicious of Y 122 from the beginning, and had good reason so to be. The ruffian Soda, for some cause or other, looked kindly on me, despite our difference of social status, which was unpromising. The hated scamp who took liberties with the sacred name of Scarraweg, ambled through his gentlemanly paces for my behoof. This was worse! Besides, my penal record charged me with a

heinous crime. Pencilled on it, to underline this charge, were hints that I was morose and secretive, and likely to be dangerous, which hints were amply corroborated by the gloomy expression of my countenance. Hence the chief warder, too much occupied at present to judge for himself, ignored, with the unbending front of a ship's figurehead, any trifling request that I might make to him, and forbore to chide the young Jack-in-office, when that puppy tried my patience to its limits.

It was plain that, although in my inner consciousness I distrusted the swell-mobsmen, it would be well for me to gather what I could from his experience. And sometimes I wondered whether I was mistaken in my estimate of that brilliant personage. Could it be that he had not been bad from the beginning; that he was only another example, differently coloured, of that class who tumble into the mud of the prison-precincts by accident, and never can wash themselves clean again? No; it was not so. I discovered that before we had been quarrying a week, on an occasion when, as usual, I was doing his work and

mine, whilst he gossiped in whispers of the men who worked with us. He spoke of them and their misfortunes in so heartless a fashion that I could not suppose he had ever had a heart; and yet his words had a twang of cynicism whose very acridness seemed to suggest that I might be wrong. People who talk for effect live in an atmosphere of lying. Was it probable that under that flinty opaque enamel there lay a gem? Was it possible, even? Hardly that! A distinguished writer once depicted a man without a shadow. Who has not shuddered over the tale of Peter Schlemil, who sold his shadow to the gentleman in black? But to be able to sell it, he must have possessed it once. Had Jaggs ever possessed a heart? and if so, to whom had he sold his treasure? for what price had he bartered it? Had I still a heart myself? Was it really defunct, or moribund, or merely in a trance? And if Jaggs had succeeded in getting rid of what could only be an incubus, was he not right, was he not to be congratulated upon his loss?

Speculations such as this passed through

my mind whilst listening to his chatter, and his plausible way of putting things oftentimes took me in—a willing gull. Perhaps, after all, my mate was what he pretended to be—a helpless involuntary victim to a mystic knife which, lopping here a vital bough and there a humanising tendril, had carved him into an image of selfishness. Perhaps he was a rudderless bark which, if the current of chance had drifted it into one channel, would have floated gaily in sunlight to a pleasant haven. Was it his fault or not, that he should have been wafted into the other—whose end lay in the remote darkness of the Cloaca? How foolish was it of me to strive to delve into these things! My mate was amusing and instructive; that should surely be sufficient. What could it signify to me who were, like him, the mustard-garb, whether he wore or were not corrupt? Many a time, as wiping the sweat from my brow after a grand struggle with a block of granite (in which struggle he had assisted me with two dainty finger-tips), I listened panting to his talk, whilst waiting for a new lease of breath, I felt that I was fortunate to be

given such a comrade. Soda might have been my mate, or some similarly repulsive scoundrel, whose name was Legion, in the prison. I used to think thus whilst working with the party who, directed by one warder only, gabbled freely when he moved to a distant place. Silence at work, forsooth ! Such a theory is absurd so long as men labour in gangs. I wished it could have been possible for my companions to be silenced. The air, the exercise, did me good; the hand of nature was like a soothing parent's; but the ribald tales, the awful blasphemy, which seemed more appalling spoken as they were in whispers (sure Satan wooed Eve in whispers) than if they had been yelled aloud, set me agog again, and blurred my judgment. But then, when locked into my cell at night, with a tranquil hour before bedtime for self-examination, I saw my mate more clearly, and my opinion of him somehow underwent a change. It was during these hours before bedtime that the old nightmare used to swoop down on the hapless Ebenezer. Then was it that a sense of the most overwhelming loneliness—solitude in a crowd—

wrapped me as in a heavy fog, and threatened to overturn my reason. That trance, that was like a mesmeric sleep, was past. Those among whom I vegetated had shaken me out of it. Absolute isolation at Pentonville had been a boon. An automaton—a chattel—a chair—well and good. The situation, though bizarre, seemed possible. Had those in whose ranks I was doomed to labour been dumb, I could have come to endure their presence patiently. But the hideous minds which their talk disclosed filled me with such dismay as, in the stillness of my little cabin, I surveyed them over and over, that by fits and starts I yearned with hungry yearning for at least the madhouse if still denied the grave. The madhouse is the fitting asylum for phantoms and delusions. Delusions are a relief from some realities. There was no delusion about this. Devils disguised as men—warm and solid, tangible—were all around in hundreds; and a creeping horror crawled along my bones as I said to myself again and again that I was one of them. The decree of the world had gone forth, and the decrees of the world are just, or are supposed so to be. The very

warders, who like collie dogs yapped about their flock—ignorant and uncultivated, but withal honest men in the main—affected to consider us as belonging to some low form of organism wherein sight and hearing are but half developed.

As I lay on my mattress, with aching limbs awaiting the order of 'Lights out,' I used to consider this point with never-ceasing wonder : *Solitary confinement for life.* Time was when such a sentence would have appeared too awful to be borne. I had passed through the ordeal for three-quarters of a year, and my brain, if dull and torpid, was healthy yet. *Confinement of a sentient human being in a den of fiends.* That was what I was enduring now, and was doomed to endure, until some crisis should arrive. Was I to fade, or to lose my reason, or of my own will to step into the slough ? One of those three cases must be mine. Which, and how soon ?

The image of my lost Mildred—my darling with the tangle of gold upon her brow—shone out sometimes like an angel of light in the obscurity, and I tried to clutch at her—in vain. She receded from my embrace with

that tearful look of grief which her face wore when I saw her in the street, and melted—and then I remembered, with a cold feeling like a knife-stab, who I was. I was Ebenezer Anderson—Y 122—the murderer, with L upon his arm—she the unsullied orphan, with forehead white as snow. MY child! Fool, fool! I had no child. I was a felon, living among felons, as it was fitting and right that I should do. Is it not the acme of vulgarity to step with fastidious toes among those who are your equals? In what was I better than Soda, Jaggs—all the rest of the surrounding crew? I was different from them only in this—that in the ways of villany I was more inexperienced than they. Surely it was my interest to make up for the defect. They were willing teachers—why should I give myself ridiculous airs by disdaining to dance unto their piping?

Although by day I was too busy and too much interested to feel all this, yet of an evening would better judgment reassert her sway. Then would I ponder, with less obliquity of mental vision, whilst essaying to peruse a book. The nerves of my self-esteem

were wounded and quivering; but by the pain they gave I was aware that they were yet alive—and in gleams of sense—like rays of winter sunlight—I perceived that my arguments with regard to Jaggs were based on fallacy; and I could even still be glad of it, and pray earnestly to be saved from Ruin.

As week followed week, during which time my two angels, bad and good, were playing at French and English for my soul, I became gradually impressed with a distinct certainty. Either I must throw up the sponge and put an end to the struggle by stepping down into the slough with all convenient speed, or else I must possess a friend—a crony with whom to commune in intimate fashion when chance offered; one whom I could trust; to whom I could chant my troubles at chapel; with whom I could converse on the Sunday promenade. Some one must be found who would not utterly revolt and disgust me; who would at least throw a cloak of decency over his sinfulness. It was the gregarious human craving after sympathy that I was conscious of. Who was this ally to be? Not Mr. George Virgin, alias Soda, certainly, though he would persist

in nodding when he hobbled by on his two sticks. Nor yet Jaggs, for though his prattle was amusing to me, the recital of my inner torments would be as Greek to him. No; nor yet Miffy, poor half-witted victim of justices' justice, who became more vacant and more wanting day by day. I must scrape acquaintance, I determined, with some of the others in the quarry-gang; for it would be hard if out of all the thirty I could not find one to suit.

Ah me! that gang, and the monotony of quarrying! Was it weeks, or months, or years since I slipped into that groove? I was so weary with battling and buffeting that my age must be by this time at least a hundred. Surely I must have been brought up to quarrying, and have spent all my life at Dartmoor? What was that flowery vision of the past, with its cultured artistic life, but mirage — an unsubstantial fantastic cloud-wreath, quite laughable, as dreams are, through its improbable distortion. The members of that gang had never worked anywhere but in this quarry, nor ever would. We began there as lads, and should continue

there till too old to use crow or pick ; and then we should be carted away as lumber, to shrivel by an infirmity fire, like medlars placed too near the stove—to dwindle and fall to pieces ; shattered chattels endowed with gabbling speech ; broken, disreputable stools that are moth-eaten, worn-out, and useless. Whence came this singular impression of weariness ? Was it an after-result of the first shock ; was it due to the storms which raged within, or was it merely the outcome of the severe discipline, of the taut trim network of ropes which moved with such still efficiency through carefully-greased blocks ? I could not tell. I was becoming as much like a chair as my mentor could desire, though my proud Spanish blood curdled as I marked the fact. Twice a day I did my part in the evolutions of the hall. Sometimes I scrubbed the floors, sometimes the iron railings ; sometimes I took my place as orderly, and helped in the serving of the dinners. Twice a day, these homely operations over, I took off my bonnet, unbuttoned my vest and gaiters, spread out my arms, as others did, and tramped off down the familiar

road, like the irresponsible slave I was, to the quarry, which was a rugged mother.

Our party was a curious amalgamation of incongruous elements, as I found out from Jaggs, who in prison matters was omniscient. There were two architects, an organist, a jeweller's salesman, a solicitor, two burglars, three 'robberies with intent,' and a bevy of vulgar pickpockets. Besides the regular staff, if I may so call it, we generally had one or two of the black sheep of the prison, as visitors on probation; men who, always more or less in trouble, had managed, by a prodigious effort, to keep a clean bill of health for a week or so, in the hopes of being released from irons.

Ours being the genuine *hard labour*, every blackguard who was under severe punishment, and who showed signs of improvement, was in due course promoted to our party from the penal cells—for it is humanely argued that even the worst scamps must not be deprived of hope—only to be banished again very shortly, however, to dark confinement, with accompanying chains, for biting off a comrade's ear or letting daylight into his carcase.

When I first became one of the regular quarrying gang, it numbered no less than three chronic members of the special or 57 Party—a terrible battalion of the most abandoned scoundrels, who were distinguished by heavy leg-irons and most villanous physiognomies. Some of them wore yellow dresses, as a sign that they had made desperate efforts at escape ; some, parti-coloured costumes of black and drab, which was a signal to those whom it concerned that they had been guilty of murderous assaults since they were in duress. The black-and-drab man who was with us for the moment exerted an uncanny influence over me, fascinating my attention with a weird, repellent interest, as the vagaries of an octopus do in a glass tank. He had begun his career, Jaggs told me, by jumping on a workhouse official—he, Jaggs, had seen him do it—(in what phase of his career, I marvelled, could that genteel individual have had aught to do with workhouses !)—and for that offence was sentenced to three months' imprisonment. Immediately upon regaining liberty, he sought out the obnoxious officer, and further maltreated him.

This escapade procured for the delinquent five years of penal servitude. By good conduct and industry he obtained remission of a year ; and again seeking out his unfortunate enemy, made a very fair attempt indeed at doing for him altogether. Perseverance is an admirable virtue, if employed in a right direction, and the pursuit of one idea may lead to admirable results. The presiding judge, however, did not approve of this gentleman's persistency, and had the extreme bad taste to make of him a 'lifer.' Then, looking on the murder of his foe as a luxury which was denied to him in this world, he changed his tactics : pummelled warders, flung filth at the governor, spat at the deputy-governor, endeavoured to fracture the chaplain's leg, twisted the arm of the Scripture-reader out of its socket, indulged in so much inconvenient playfulness that he became a 'black-and-drab man,' and was enrolled in 57 Party. As a worker in the quarry, where he appeared for a few days from time to time, he differed little in manner from the rest, save in an increased degree of idleness and taciturnity, until the moment came for flying

out. Then he raged like a madman, foamed at the mouth, struck at the person who was nearest to him with the first weapon which came to hand, and had to be hustled off forthwith, shrieking and yelling like a fiend, to be calmed down again by a course of penal diet. That peach-faced young jackanapes who annoyed me so had a hard time of it sometimes with these casual 57's, in spite of his bluster, and that was a small comfort to me. He held his life in his hand, for there was no knowing when one or other would break out. He was never out of peril, for ominous gleams were always glittering in treacherous eyes; and had the visible presence of the armed cordon of civil guards been withdrawn for a moment, it was probable that his browbeating might have been brought to a premature conclusion. When in a quiescent condition, that black-and-drab man did what he was forced to do as badly as he could, spoke to none, took heed of nobody. A presentiment seemed to whisper to me that I myself might come to be goaded into that man's state. *Facilis descensus Averni!* I had crossed the fence which divides sheep from goats; had been

handed over to the hangman, then snatched out of his grasp. The demon within me only slumbered as yet ; he was not slain. Why should not I too—hopeless, maddened, without support or sympathy—become a black-and-drab man, or even a 57 ? My brain reeled with terror at the thought, as, sick and faint, I leaned against a block of stone, and murmured, with speechless anguish : ‘ Lead me not into temptation, O my Father. Consider my weakness, and show mercy ! ’ I mistrusted my strength so utterly, that the mere sight of one of these arch-wretches caused me nausea, and I felt more strongly than before the need of a trusted crony.

There was one young fellow in our gang who struck my fancy. A fine young fellow, tall and slim, with broad shoulders and a military carriage, and a handsome face too, open and smiling. His name was Fern. ‘ Who was he, and what had he done ? ’ I inquired of my mentor.

Jaggs looked him up and down in his sly sideways fashion, and passed his tongue over his lips as if there was something specially satisfactory about his case.

‘ Oh, he’s a beauty !’ he observed presently ; ‘ a lovely specimen of the working of the system. I’ve met him before, and watched his career. You see, by his badge, that this is his second lag. As his badge is changed, so is his face. Its lines are twisted into quite a different pattern to those they wore when I knew him first. What a lovely specimen ! Ho, ho ! That chap was a soldier, who, in a moment of temper, struck one who was above him, and who, by the beautifully just laws of England, was sent in consequence, at the age of eighteen, to herd with the scum of the earth. He was heedless and silly, and didn’t realise the severity of the military code till it was too late. Then he was asinine enough to be shocked and disgusted ; gave way to sulks, and got into petty, insignificant scrapes, for which he was promptly punished with bread and water and loss of marks. That didn’t improve him, as you may suppose, and he soon lost so many marks that his privileges suffered, and he discovered one fine day that he would not even be allowed to write a letter to his friends for four years (he was in for seven) ! Then he grew riled and desperate.

You never saw such trivial complaints. Reports for not wearing his jacket properly, for talking at chapel, and so forth—mere aggravation and worry. And so from bad to worse, till on another fine day, when, as orderly, he was looking after dinners, he happened to pitch an extra loaf to a hungry man out of the basket (after everyone had been served, mind you), and for that he was reported as a thief. “Stole a loaf of bread”—cells, and so forth. Then he flew in a passion, and told the governor, in his rage, that he had been an honest lad, had never stolen so much as a pin’s value in his life, but that now he would give up all that. “The crime I committed,” he said, “was a purely military one. As a civilian, I should have been fined possibly five shillings for assault. If I commit a military crime, I ought to be sent to a military prison, where others of my own standing would be my pals; instead of which, you place me among felons—the worst scoundrels in the land—they are my companions for a period of years; and when I go forth, I go branded with the felon’s mark. No longer a soldier, people won’t ask what my crime was.

They'll say 'he was a convict, therefore he is a ruffian ;' and so I am a ruined man. Very well. It's your own doing. There's no use in being honest, and I tell you plainly, that when I go out, I shan't be honest. I'll learn all I can in prison here, and when I go out I'll put it into practice." And he did. He's as clever a hand now as you could wish to see, and got on for a long while without being caught again. He's as hard as nails now, and amuses himself with instructing youngsters.'

'This is not true,' I cried in indignation. 'You are deceiving me, Jaggs. Such an iniquity as this is not possible in England.'

'Isn't it?' sneered my mate. 'I admit it's the loveliest joke of all, but it does go on, and I wouldn't see it altered for worlds. Bless your little soul! you'll find lots of these military prisoners in every convict-prison in the country.'

I was so horrified that I took an opportunity to question the man myself. It was too true. With all the prating about reformation, about moral training, and the rest, this was what was done with soldier-prisoners, and is done

still. I am not speaking of the separate batch of soldiers who occupy, or used so to do, a special pentagon at Millbank. I speak of *convicts*—felons who wear the mustard garb, the blue-striped smock, the fustian gaiters; men who are numbers like the rest of us—murderers, burglars, thieves. At this very moment, as I write (long years after the events took place which I am describing), such men are to be found at Dartmoor, Portland, Wormwood Scrubbs—honest men tossed into the vortex; without future, as I, the murderer, was without future; without hope, as I, the slayer of my fellow-man, was without hope. Many are of opinion that reformation as regards criminals is but an idle word. That may or may not be the case, but it is certainly clear that the blot of blots which should be removed from our penal system is this sending of military prisoners to penal servitude for purely military crimes. The Fenians were sent to consort with ordinary criminals in convict-prisons; we know with what result. Yet they enjoyed special privileges. Their lot was lightened as much as was possible; but,

for all that, those who sent them there are fully aware of their mistake! With the military prisoners it is otherwise. No distinction whatever is made between the soldier who struck or was about to strike his officer, and the habitual picker of pockets. It is certain that this is not a mistake; it is a crime—a most iniquitous and heinous crime, for which its perpetrators will have to answer before the tribunal of the great God of Justice.

I conversed with the unhappy soldier Fern, in whom I half expected to find the desired friend. What could it matter to me if I found him to be illiterate, so that his heart was pure; so that we could help each other to keep straight? Alas, alas! he was worse than many of the others. I have heard it said that if an honest man is caught in the dangerous net woven of importunity and opportunity, his fall will be the greater in proportion to his pristine uprightness. This fellow, despite his engaging presence, had fallen desperately low. He was Jaggs, without his humour and gay spirits; Soda, without his ruffianly exterior. He had arrived at the condition to which I half

desired to come: a condition in which the soul is in accord with the felon's livery.

Conversation, I found, amongst the brethren of the broad-arrow was by no means confined to surreptitious talk at labour and the hour's promenade on Sunday. At chapel we sang our scraps of news, whilst pretending to be intent upon our hymn-book. It was curious how vocally inclined some became (whose indolence usually took the form of yawns) when they found themselves in the neighbourhood of a new-comer. On those occasions we were glad of Gregorian chants, as being the simplest media for the unfolding of political events, or a recital of what was passing in the delightful outer world. Our psalmody resembled an oratorio, wherein old pals of former laggings assumed the parts of declamatory prophets, while Mrs. Grundy assumed the chief female character. Jaggs, as he had arranged, was long ago a member of the choir, and created diversions now and then by surprising and unexpected impromptus, suggestive of a parrot with the croup. His blood-spitting turned out the failure it deserved; a wretched, futile artifice,

which had already been perpetrated by many another—a contemptible piece of imitation unworthy of so fine a genius, which was exposed with prompt and diabolical completeness by the wronged and vengeful Scarraweg.

‘Oh, that’s your caper, is it, nevv’y?’ the chief warder had grunted with a grin. ‘Won’t do, lad. We know all about it. Ground-glass and stomach-kneading. If you don’t look out you’ll be reported for injuring your precious constitooshun.’

So Jaggs, with curses on his inhuman uncle, remained in the gang, and set his nimble wits to work upon a project of vengeance.

In the course of our psalm-singing I found myself sometimes engaged in a florid duet with a man who sat next to me, and who belonged to one of the workshops. He was a pleasant-mannered person I saw at once, though his minstrelsy, like mine, left a good deal to be desired. It is astonishing how quickly we become readers of features when all are dressed alike. The man had a pleasing and shiny countenance, undisfigured by the stubbly beard which was common to most

of us ; for it was evident that in a former condition he could have worn little hair. His chin and lip were smooth as a woman's ; his eyelashes pale and sparse ; the places where eyebrows should have been were hairless, but marked by a line of red. He was not handsome, but it was a pleasant face, partly, perhaps, because of its tranquillity, partly in consequence of the content which sat on it.

A refined man this, whose subdued tones and low-modulated speaking voice interested me in him at once. I quite liked going to chapel now, instead of finding it irksome, for it was a pleasure to sit near him ; and I looked out with anxiety Sunday after Sunday in hopes of coming upon him at exercise. For some time I was disappointed. We were exercised according to our landings, and I knew not where he dwelt. That beatified air of his must belong to an easy conscience, I argued. Perhaps he was here on a false charge (such cases occur now and then). Yes ; that must be it. There was none of the jaded, hunted look about this gentleman, which is generally a characteristic of the

convict. No lines on that calm mask of remorse or dogged obstinacy or fierce cunning, such as most of us wore. His conscience absolved him of crime; therefore he could bear his burthen as a good Christian does his cross, knowing that it is a trial sent to refine his heart and wean him from a mundane love for sinful pleasures, preparatory to a move aloft.

The occupant of the next cell but one to mine began to grow his hair and beard, the indispensable preliminary to liberty. Three months later he went away; the cell-door stood open; within it, on the floor, was a new suit of clothes. Who was to wear them? who was to be my neighbour? It was evening, and I was walking busily about, for I had been told off to snip my comrades' heads; when I heard a tramping upon the iron stair, and could not resist the desire to crane over the balusters. It was the modest gentleman with the pleasant face! Here was luck. In this matter of a crony, upon which I had set my heart, my pleading, it seems, was to be answered.

'I am so glad it's you!' I cried out, waving

the scissors in my glee. 'And you've got a brand-new suit of clothes. I saw them waiting for you on the floor.'

'The governor is very good,' he murmured meekly. 'Everyone is very kind;' and with lowered eyelids and pleasant smile he passed into his new abode.

That peachen jackanapes was at me in a moment, yelping like a sheep-dog at my heels.

'Hi! you 122. Be careful with them scissors, or I'll report you for attempting to attack a prisoner. You dangerous, wicked varmint! It beats me how Mr. Scarraweg allows hands like yours that have shed the blood of a hinnocent to handle a big pair of scissors. But there! they don't care if one of you scoundrels cuts my throat. Good officers seem cheap. A warder had need to have nine lives, he would. He's of no more value than a bit of junk! New clothes, eh? Ah! he's a prisoner of the best sort, he is, such as you're never likely to be. You won't git new clothes. He never gives trouble or hurts a fly, he doesn't, or brings a chap's heart into his mouth with villany. How-

ever he came here I don't know ; but that ain't my business. My job's to do what I'm told, and so's yourn. And you'll just be good enough to snip L R Y 233 and Y 240, and look slippery about it, or you'll be reported so sure as eggs is eggs, which they always is when not chickens. Come, go it ! d'ye hear ? and so on, as usual, harrying and worrying, though I cared little now, for I knew that on the very next Sunday I would have my way.

And so it came about. My new neighbour glanced with compassion on the L upon my arm, then into my face with so bright a look that the frozen frowning furrows on my brow seemed to thaw and melt away.

He was a clerk in holy orders, he at once informed me, by name Tilgoe—the Rev. Aurelius Tilgoe ; then added in a mournful undertone : ‘ It is distressing that one of my cloth should wear this dress. But it is not my fault. Indeed it is not. The Lord's holy will be done ! ’

He did not profess, however, to be altogether innocent. Led astray by home worries, half distraught, he had (so he declared, without

attempt at prevarication) made a slip, a deplorable stumble ; something shadowy connected with a bit of paper ; and now was munching the fruit of his unlucky sowing with such relish as philosophy could provide. I felt a thrill. My prayer was answered. This was the man I wanted. His case was akin to mine. Like me, he was a martyr to circumstance. We would, when allowed to be together, mingle the tears of our repentance and act as mutual supports. With unselfish joy, mingled with selfish sorrow, I perceived by his badge that his term was one of a dozen years. A long time for one who had done so little ! But this again had been pre-ordained, perchance, in mercy. For a decade we two would enjoy daily communion ; would help each other with the large welling sympathy which one who has fallen can tender to another. When his time was up my new life would have become second nature. By help of the counsel of this clergyman my steel would have become tempered in the fire ; I should no longer fear to fall ; I should be strong to resist temptation.

On that first Sunday we communed ear-

nestly. He seemed as much taken with me as I with him ; and on my knees, bowing low with bended head, I thanked heaven for the boon I had been vouchsafed. The Rev. Mr. Tilgoe would be a daily help. He could feel as I felt, appreciate the refinements of my wretchedness. I was very, very sorry for this gentleman ; almost as sorry as for myself ; for he was world-worn as I was ; but, unlike me, a miracle of content. What a lesson ! And I might perhaps be of use to him. Who so well-fitted as my miserable self to sympathise in the sorrows of another ? That tiresome spell of morning chapel would be a fillip to look forward to. A few words of consolation would be a salve to each of us for the day—he in his tailor's workshop, I in the quarry—and it was with a deep sense of unworthiness and admiration that I recalled how rapt he always was at prayers.

I cared nothing now for the companionship of '57s ;' the rattling of their irons no longer told upon my nerves. It was with surprise certainly, but deadened interest, that I remarked two new members added to our gang one morning, as we assembled in the yard

for parade and 'rubbing down.' A certain amount of interest I could not but feel, for the two new-comers were no other than Miffy and George Virgin.

It is melancholy to consider how well we plan things, and how grievously ill many of our plans turn out. Mr. Soda had cunningly arranged his affairs so as to ensure for himself 'an easy lag,' and on those terms was prepared to behave himself. But that crumpet-faced scamp who, be it remembered, was capable of preferring the prospect of appearing for years a cripple, and of gaining few good-conduct marks, to the lending of his burly frame for the benefit of the prison budget, was, in spite of himself, the victim of a miracle. We know that on arriving, he was stricken with paralysis. For a time the doctor, who, unless forewarned, was careless and good-natured, had refrained from interfering with the herculean humbug. He had even (so pitiable with the aspect of so huge a body tottering upon two frail sticks) admitted him into 'the doctor's party,' a cohort of invalids who potter about and do odd jobs about the offices. Perhaps he was more sly

than he appeared, and wished simply to see how far his patient's laziness would carry him. His experiment at all events was brought abruptly to an end by the discovery of the stout criminal one day in the kitchen lapping other people's broth when the cook's back was turned. Now no one who has tasted it will deny that prison diet is admirable of its kind. None but ultra-mendacious convicts would dare to cavil at the quality of the food. The whole-meal bread would not be out of place on a duke's breakfast-table; the soup is luscious and well-seasoned; the beef and mutton beyond reproach. The diet is excellent, *but scanty*; enough is served out to keep body and soul well together, and no more; and it struck the good doctor as particularly unpardonable that one prisoner who did no work should fill his belly at the direct expense of another who did. Moved to ire, he ordered the delinquent to 'the farm!' Soda could scarce believe his big bats' ears, for the millennium of the convict is the hospital; but he reckoned without his host.

'I have been too much occupied, Virgin,'

said that sly doctor, 'to give proper attention to your case, but I will now. I shall try the galvanic battery. Don't look so frightened, it won't hurt. You'll hardly feel it. See! Here's another paralytic case who has undergone the battery before. He doesn't mind it—do you?'

The other case said 'No. It felt like tickling;' so Mr. Soda, reassured, watched the other case with all his oyster eyes.

The battery was arranged, the wires fixed, the other case lay back and purred, while his paralysed limb moved to and fro in gentle oscillation. The patient was given a glass of cod-liver oil to comfort him, and closed his lids in sleep. This was first-rate, thought Soda. The battery first—that felt like tickling; then some oil. How prime! True enough, it didn't hurt—it didn't even tickle; but the great fat leg moved up and down exactly as that of the other case had done, while the doctor gazed intently at his watch, with corrugated forehead.

'Splendid,' he said presently, 'a downright splendid case. You must have suffered awfully, my poor fellow!'

Soda moaned and screwed up his eyes. Paralysis was in his family. His poor dear aunt and his second cousin, twice removed, had died of it. Did the croker think he was in danger? He felt faint—so dreadful faint—and would like a glass of wine, if handy.

‘Wine—certainly!’ exclaimed the brisk medico. ‘Why, what is this? The wires have never been attached, the current has never worked. One more try, my poor fellow; and then, if all goes well, the glass of wine.’

This was quite another matter. Shock succeeded shock, till the fat legs kicked and quivered, and perspiration poured down the crumpet-face. In vain did Soda shriek for mercy. The doctor was busy with his watch, and declared that the case was a most interesting one. At last, when the ruffian was so exhausted that he could hardly speak, the medico removed the instrument, and summoning the attentive Scarraweg, who stood like a stone before the door, gave him the crutches, and handed over to his special care his interesting patient, with a gruff recom-

mendation of 'fresh air' and plenty of it. So it happened that Mr. Soda became suddenly quite well, and the group who arrived at Princetown together found themselves reunited under circumstances which did not preclude a modicum of quiet chat.

Poor Miffy looked thinner and paler than when he first arrived—cadaverous and water-eyed. He had really been ordered fresh air for the good of his health, and the rosy-cheeked young jackanapes, our keeper, had received special instructions not to overwork him. No such recommendation had been given with regard to the ex-cripple ; so, tired for the nonce of worrying me, he turned his ingenuity into a new channel. But Soda's behaviour to him amazed me when I remembered what I had heard of him at Chatham. The huge ruffian might have picked up his youthful tormentor like a child, and have hugged his breath out of his body as a bear does. Had not his conduct at one time been so outrageous that he had been charitably supposed to be afflicted with homicidal mania ? Now that he was compelled to work, he was certain, if consistency may be expected from

one so preternaturally crooked, to break out and be as violent as the black and drab man. Surely the overbearing young warder was acting with great imprudence. Yet no. The more he nagged, the more affably did Soda grin. Why? He and Jaggs were planning something which—as their side glances showed—boded no good to the young warder. There could be little doubt but that they meant mischief. The face of Jaggs wore its least pleasant sneer, his eye its coldest glitter, as, to make common cause against a common foe, he surrendered his dignity as ‘gentleman’ and stooped to conspire with one whose coarseness he professed to despise.

It was no affair of mine, so, as a matter of delicacy, I turned from them, and addressed my talk to the postmaster. Poor fellow! How sad an example of a feeble nature wrecked. He was like a cork tossed into the maelstrom. If there was a scrap of energy still left in him, it was deadened by the discipline which ruled us. He did not complain. He supposed that he deserved his fate, though too addlebrained to know how

or why. Mr. Scarraweg was gentle with him, very gentle; the scripture-reader, who was always fussing in and out of the cells, was good enough to read to him, though his poor head swam round in trying to understand. But it was kind, wasn't it, to take all this trouble for so helpless and forlorn a creature? He had done even more—and here Miffy's hollow eyes sparkled. He had promised to write on his own account to the dear wife and cherished little ones that they might know that papa was well and that he looked forward to the day of his release. That much he could understand, and his jaded mouth twitched as he looked down the dreary vista.

‘But it was wrong, very wrong, to be ungrateful,’ he declared, with a wan smile. ‘Where every one was kind, it was wicked to repine. Mr. Scarraweg was kind, though he looked so brusque and bluff. Sailors are always kind; so there was nothing very wonderful in that.’

Praise of the chief warden was the one thing that could rouse Jaggs into ill-temper, and he turned round and rated Miffy with

such cruel words as scared him, and caused my hot blood to bubble.

‘The chief warder, forsooth I’ scoffed Jaggs. ‘I scored two and he scored two, but this morning I scored another.’

‘What did you do?’ asked everyone in chorus.

‘Sommut awful, I hope,’ put in Mr. Virgin.

‘Something he won’t like,’ returned Jaggs composedly. ‘It ain’t much of a thing, but tied hand and foot as we are, we must be satisfied with doing what we can. You know that dog of his?’

‘Jack, the retriever?’ exclaimed Miffy, clapping his hands. ‘Such a nice dog! He too, is kind to me.’

‘Yes, Jack. That old devil’s very fond of the dog; so if I can’t touch the master, there’s nothing for it but to wake up the dog. That’s logical, I fancy. Well, I found a long pin this morning on our landing, and placed it inside my sleeve, wondering what use I could make of such a prize, when Jack came bouncing into the yard as if to ask for it. He’d no business there, of course, but dogs ain’t respecters of places, though they

are, I'm told, of persons. Never cared for animals myself. The moment I saw him, I thought, Aha! my friend. You come on forbidden ground, do you? So much the better for me, and the worse for you. And whipping his head tight between my knees as I stood behind a door, I stuck the pin into his back just where he can't get at it, right up to the head among his curly hair. He'll howl, I'll warrant; but old Scarraweg may look for a month of Sundays before he finds it. Aha! the old devil. He keeps me in this infernal draughty place, does he, and doesn't care how bad my fingers get? I'll be even with him some day, never fear! Meanwhile his dog shall keep him awake o' nights.'

Both Miffy and I gave vent to a cry of horror. What a cold-blooded, revengeful brute this airy fellow must be, to have no compunction in torturing a generous animal that never injured him!

Soda was disappointed and disgusted.

'Pah!' he grumbled. 'A dawg—can't ye do better nor that? What's a dawg? When Scarraweg 'ears 'im a 'owling, 'e'll kick 'im out of the place. Leastwise I should if he

bothered. What'll 'e care for the dawg? A dawg's all very well if he keeps quiet and don't eat too much, and wags his tail and that—but, I say, come, young fellow. You hold that caterwauling, will yer? You haven't got a big pin in your back, I s'pose?"

This last speech was addressed to Miffy, who at the idea of a dog being put to pain in order to vex his master, was much distressed, and kept up a subdued kind of wail. But at the reproof he quickly held his peace, looking up at the bully in sideways fashion, very much like a whipped dog himself. There was little wonder that he should be frightened, for Soda, glaring down at him, with chin protruding and glassy, half-veiled eye, was as ill-looking a villain as ever stepped. The bumps and crannies in his face spoke of passions never curbed except by indolence; his features of animal appetite and revenge and jealousy run riot. Natures such as this was are peculiarly subject to ungovernable ebbs and flows, to the committing of strange and eccentric acts of violence. It is as though a brain, debilitated by excess, were subjected to the working of some indefinite form of irritation, against the effects of

which the will had not strength enough to struggle. Yet, by a singular paradox, convicts of this type, who are unable as well as unwilling to govern themselves, exert a malign and fatal influence over those whose intelligence is of a lower calibre than their own. The auriole of bravery gilds their wild acts in the eyes of the semi-imbecile, and so endows them with a power for evil of which they are not slow to take advantage. They make of these semi-idiots the instruments of their own designs, by inciting them to transgress prison rules and to commit deeds of mischief and insubordination. I could see, as we worked together in a group, that the luckless postmaster was already under Soda's thumb. He was ordered about under the very nose of the peachen-cheeked jackanapes, and the water-eyed purloiner of stamps obeyed the whispered hints of the bully with far greater alacrity than he did the words of his legitimate slave-driver.

I was much puzzled by this, and foresaw a black future for the postmaster. Was he too (supposing that complete idiotcy did not step in to rescue him) destined to go entirely to

ruin, as the unhappy soldier had done? If it was to be so, what a moment of despair was preparing for the consumptive wife and her little ones, when on his release they would find him transformed. Better far for all parties that the veil should drop upon his faculties, that idiocy should bestow oblivion, that the walls of the asylum should save him from himself.

While I looked at the two, and marvelled what the tie was that could make so ill-assorted a pair, Soda was making uncouth advances to me. He puckered up his cheeks and winked and nodded his bullet-head, and went through a curious pantomime indicative of something wondrous clever, pointing now and again, with a thumb over his shoulder, in the direction of our guardian. What he meant I could not make out. Did he expect to get me, too, under his thumb? The idea was so absurd that I smiled, and taking that as an encouragement, he whispered in my ear:

‘That fellar’s to be bought. The first thing to be done’s to square a screw. Your pals at home, now, must have lots of dibs.’

‘Lots of what?’ I inquired, quite at sea.

‘Rhino, ochre, d’narly, toky, blunt. Well, there now, how your edication is neglected, to be sure! Money.’

‘No,’ I said, sighing; ‘I have neither friends nor money. I am alone in the world.’

Soda’s face fell, and he gave a low whistle of disappointment. Then plucking up fresh courage, and administering to Miffy a savage kick by way of letting off steam, he held out a great leg-of-mutton hand.

‘That’s bad,’ he said, ‘for that screw has got to be squared, since we’re at his mercy, the cantankerous upstart! But we’ll manage it some other way. You shall be in the swim. I like you. Touch flesh.’

‘You like me. Why?’ I asked abruptly.

‘’Cos you shied stools at the psalm-patterer at Pentonville, and ’cos you up and threatened the guv’nor. I saw yer do that, and said “Brayvo,” for I was proud to see it. For a beginner, you promise well, and we shall make summat of yer, tho’ you be a “gentleman-lag.” Touch flesh, I say. My mawley’s at the service of any bloke as kills a screw, or tries to. I’ve done a respectable thing or

two in that line myself, and I'll do more, you'll see. Pah! How I hate the lot! But as for stickin' pins in dawgs! There—it's contemptible!

He took my hand and squeezed it, and a lump of disgust seemed to climb into my throat. My comrades, then, thought I was morose and dangerous, as well as the authorities. How I wished I could come upon a looking-glass! A network of bad lines must surely be graven on my face. What a mercy it was that I had met Aurelius Tilgoe. His words of encouragement must stand 'twixt me and these companions. Soda pressed my hand with effusion, but I did not return the pressure, and it fell dead.

After my indignant remonstrance with regard to the dog, Jaggs had flushed up and laughed it off. He saw he had made a bad impression, and, for some reason of his own, declined to quarrel with me. I felt no such motive, and turned my back on him with loathing when he attempted to deprecate my wrath. There must be two sides to a quarrel, and Jaggs, whose temper rarely escaped control, elected to be benignant and concilia-

tory ; so when he addressed me directly, I had no option but to hear. He assumed his most innocent and infantine manner, and perpetrated airy little jokes ; but this time they had no effect. When rating Miffy, he had half dropped his mask, and I had caught a glimpse of the cold-blooded villain underneath. And then the incident of the dog. Upon my word, of the two, I preferred Soda at this moment, for he, at least, had the courage of his rascality. And I had listened to this man's teaching, and thought of him as a Gamaliel. Good heavens ! how low I must be falling ! I would never speak to him again—never, never ; and yet, while forming this resolve, I was furtively looking in his direction, and was astonished to see a new expression on his seamy face, in which was a tinge of sadness. I felt nervous and heated, and out of sorts—and withal, exceeding cross. If only I might retire to my cell for a while, and think. But here was another of the phases of our punishment. We were machines, without feelings or emotions. If we chose to be afflicted with moods, on our own heads must rest the consequence.

Jaggs went through the form of using a pick for a while in shy silence; then said, with a whimsical, half-tearful smirk :

‘You think me a real bad un, Anderson, don’t you ? I can see through you as clearly as a bit of glass. You think me wicked, and revengeful, and designing. I know you do, and it’s not for me to say you’re wrong. I’m bad, and I don’t want to be good. Yet I wasn’t always bad. What’ll you say if I let out a secret which I’m ashamed of now ? You won’t believe it, I’ll lay odds, but I tried once to reform—to turn over a new leaf, and be a good boy. I did, upon my life—what a thundering ass ! Ha, ha ! ho, ho !’ and Jaggs, over whom had come a momentary cloud of feeling which made his voice falter, straightened his back and opened wide his mouth to give free vent to a peal of derisive laughter. The notion of his ever having attempted to be a good boy was so immensely funny, that, regardless of the peach-faced one who threatened him, he broke into peal after peal of merriment, till the water ran down his hollow cheeks, and he seemed to be choking with the fun of it. His laughter puzzled Soda, who

stared from under his swollen eyelids ; it terrified Miffy, who shrank away. As for me, it jarred my nerves, for it was like the laughter of devils who are rejoicing over the damned.

‘Yes, it’s true, by the living Jingo !’ Jaggs went on, himself again, so soon as he regained his breath. ‘I know better now, of course ; but during my first sentence a parson got round me, and I was low and miserable, and couldn’t make it all out—everything seemed so unequal and unjust—and I thought, perhaps he was right and I was wrong, and that at all events I’d put it to the test. Was not I a fool, and didn’t I deserve to fail ?’ The infantine veneer, the gloss of artlessness, was all gone. Jaggs spoke with a hectic spot upon each cheek-bone, and the quick, clear, frosty accents of one who has deeply suffered. ‘As I’ve told you before, I think, I was a clerk once in a good position,’ he said ; ‘and though I was young and inexperienced, I saw well enough that my master’s code of honour was the loosest of the loose. He did queer things, which were pretty much the same as putting a hand into another man’s pocket. Yet he was respected and looked up to as a

great city light. I followed suit on a small scale, thinking I could not do better than imitate so good an example, and, of course, went to the wall. Had five years for that; behaved well, got off with four, and promised the patterer, before I left, that I'd go to a Prisoners' Aid Society, and be set straight. Ha, ha! Did you ever go to a Prisoners' Aid Society, Soda?

'Not such a noodle,' returned that worthy. 'I was warned off when I first joined by other lags, who told me they were a snare and a delusion.'

'Right you are,' retorted Jaggs, with feeling. 'When I was at school, I used to have to write "Honesty's the best policy" twelve times upon a page. What a glorious game it is! Stingy people salve their consciences by repeating, to all who ask them for a penny, "No man need starve in England. Go to the workhouse. We pay rates and taxes. If you dare to beg, you'll be sent to quod." Just hearken to this. When I was set free, I really did intend that first time to try the square, and started off in great spirits for the office of a Prisoners' Aid Society, to whose

secretary my gratuity money had been sent. Never mind which. There I found, loafing about, a lot of other ex-convicts whom I would rather not have met. However, that could not be avoided, so in I went. "Oh! employment, is it?" says a youngster on a high stool, turning over a ledger as big as himself. "Times are hard, and employment's difficult to find for blackguards like you; but I'll see what's to be done." This seemed quisby, so I said with caution, "Are you sure you'll get me work? I'm a clerk—or used to be—good at figures and all that." "Clerk, are you?" he says. "Go along. Nobody wants clerks who have been gaol-birds." "Then you can't find me work which I am capable of doing?" said I, persisting. This annoyed the small chap on the high stool, who looked at me while he cut a book leisurely, turning up his snub nose, because my coat was of the prison cut, and he seemed to smell something nasty, and observed: "Do what you like. We don't wish to be bothered with you, except for the sake of charity. You're trouble enough, Lord knows, and little satisfaction. Either you do what you are told,

and be thankful for our noble efforts on your behalf, or you clear out of this office. We don't want idle blackguards here." I should like to have kicked over his high stool and sent him sprawling, but I had promised the patterer to see it out, and he was master of the situation, because he had my money in his keeping. So I went off, promising to return next day. Well, to make a long story short, I went the next day, and the next, and the next. Always no work, or else a promise of such work as I was quite unfit to do, and it took me all my time to screw my own money out of him by dribblets—that is, so much of it as was not swallowed by inquiries. One day the youngster suggested labour in the docks. I could have found that without his help. Then he suggested one idiotic thing, and then another, till at last I tormented him so that he nearly swallowed his paper-knife, and sung out, as I appeared as usual at the door for the hundredth time, "Out you go! There isn't any work for you; so don't come bothering here any more, or I'll complain to the police, and you'll lose your ticket-of-leave." "Give me some money,

then," I exclaimed, "to seek work on my own account." "There ain't no more," he answered; "it's all spent in making inquiries." "If I had done that sort of thing, I should have been told it was—well, not a charity," I said to myself, as, whistling to keep my temper, I walked away. A prisoner is supposed to be given three pounds, or whatever it may happen to be, when he comes out, to pull himself together with while he is looking for work; and the parson, who ought to know better, advises him, more often than not, to go to a Prisoners' Aid Society to put him in a fair way of finding it. I will say that the warders are more candid than the parsons; not but what many of the parsons, too, disapprove of these affairs. In most prisons there's a box for subscriptions to the aid societies. I know one prison in London where the box remains always empty, except for a button or two thrown in sometimes for chaff. The warders know better than to subscribe even a stray copper, and it isn't for want of charity on their part.

'Well, as I was saying, I left the office and cogitated as to what was to be done. Was

the parson humbugging me? No. He was an earnest chap, such as there are few; and I don't know why, but I had made up my mind to try the honest lay, just to please him. If it broke down, it shouldn't be my fault. My money had been spent by that young whippersnapper with the paper-knife. The police should know of it; I'd have that satisfaction. I went to Scotland Yard to report a change of residence. "Where are you going?" said the bobby. "To the work'us in Mount Street," I said. "That's a rum place," said the bobby; "there's no accounting for tastes. You must tell the master you're a lag, you know, or we must." "Don't do that," says I. "I must; it's my dooty," says he. So off I went, determined to see the thing through to the end, but beginning to laugh a bit in my sleeve, I must tell you. I didn't say what I was at the work'us, but, Lord have mercy on you! they found out somehow, and devilish quick. Then came the virtuous indignation of the honest, able-bodied pauper, who's the idlest, most good-for-nothing wretch on the face of creation. He's utterly worthless, and cumbers the ground; but he's never had a

lagging. "A convict here! Oh, horror!" he cried. "What a disgrace to honest folks!" And so I found the place a hell, and was glad enough to turn out. I had gone right through the thing from the top down to the bottom, and my conscience was clear for ever. Try as I would, going down even to the degradation of the work'us, it was no use. *It was not possible for the likes of me to turn honest.* There was nothing for it but crime, or death by starvation. Not unnaturally, I preferred the former. Nobody would let me earn my bread. Even the work'us door was shut. Wasn't it lucky that I was clever with my fingers? Prisoners were kinder to me than the authorities. *They taught me a trade which I could follow,* and—good luck to all, I say—thanks to them, I've followed it ever since.'

A low murmur of approval greeted the end of Jaggs's story. Again I looked at him in fear. Was he deceiving me? Was there no end to the dreadful disclosures which he was to make? Was he to be my Gamaliel, after all, with a mission to tear from me every vestige of respect for the world's ways?

Alas! his story was evidently a true one. There was a hard flippancy about the way he told his tale which had about it the ring of truth. My case, then, was far from being an isolated one. It appeared, indeed, as if there were many others who were more to be pitied than myself.

‘We belong to a hunted race!’ I wailed aloud for very bitterness. ‘We are marked out to be chased by those who are more fortunate. Like the Windsor stags, we are to be turned out from time to time with our horns cut, lest we should hurt the hounds; to be caught and shut up again till next we’re wanted, so soon as the run is over!’

Jaggs looked at me with triumph. He had conquered me again. The dog episode was forgotten; I was listening to the corroborative evidence of the other convicts, who little by little had gathered round, and leaning on their picks and shovels, were wagging their heads in concert.

‘What he says is Bible truth,’ the ex-soldier observed bluntly. ‘What a pity the public don’t know of it! They go carping at imaginary grievances, without even so much

as seeing the real ones that yawn at their feet. Straining at gnats and swallowing of camels has been the way of the world time out of mind, and always will be.'

'That's so,' added another. 'On my very last lagging as ever was, my conduct was so good that I became a blue-dress man—privileged class, you know—and, consequently, was to receive three extra pounds as gratuity when I got my ticket; that made six pounds in all. But to the extra gratuity, for some insane reason or another, is appended the condition that a man *must take it through a Prisoners' Aid Society*. It's a monstrous silly rule, and an unjust one, too. Either I had earned my extra gratuity, or I hadn't. If I hadn't, I didn't want the favour which was denied to others; if I had, it was surely my own to do with as I would. Is that straight?'

'Surely! Go ahead, old man,' was shouted in a chorus.

'Well, I refused the extra gratuity that I had earned by good conduct, rather than submit to such injustice. I knew all about the Prisoners' Aid Societies; the humbug

that they are, for the most part, seeming, as which they do on the surface, to guarantee that they cannot accomplish ; and I didn't intend to waste my time and my money dancing after them. Why, if I had gone to them about my extra gratuity they would have spent it all in attempting to get work which didn't exist ; then they would have spent the other three pounds which I had in my pocket, and have wasted my time and my patience and my temper, and have thrown me among a lot of chaps I didn't care just then to meet ; and what should I have got in exchange ? Nothing ; absolutely nothing whatsoever !

‘Hear, hear !’ again cried the chorus.

‘In my case,’ jeered a third, ‘they squandered my money, and when I kicked up a blazes row, said, “Here’s a basket of oranges for you to sell about the streets.” I told ’em to go to the devil ; for I could have bought that myself for a few shillings without their assistance. And their charge for this splendid act of charity was three pounds sterling !’

‘My brother’s case is the worst of the lot,’ quavered a little old wizened individual, who had lost all his teeth, and whose face was

much cut about with fighting. 'The parsons are always talking fallals about avoiding temptations and our old pals, and that gammon, as if the likes of us could choose our own company. And just see what some of the societies do by way of keeping us straight, and to whom they'd like to send us if we didn't know better nor that! My brother came to grief through drinking, as most of us do, I reckon; but he was a demon when the drop was in. He went to a society for work, and where do you think they packed him off to? Down to a low pub. in Wapping, where prostitutes and sailors hang out, to make himself generally useful. And he did, with a vengeance. He had to serve out spirits all night through, treated by this one and by that; till he was as drunk as an owl, and somehow had a brooch in his pocket which hadn't ought to be there, and so went back to the hotel without delay.'

'In Wapping, eh?' another inquired reflectively. 'One of the societies as I know of has got a pub. in Tooley Street, where they send men who kick up a row and decline to accept their excuses. A very clever dodge

that is, for somehow or other the barman's place is always being filled up, and yet it's always vacant.'

'How's that, mate?' asked his neighbour.

'How's that, stoopid?' retorted the other; 'because the unfortunate men are thrown straight into temptation; so of course they are kicked out of the place and sent back to prison before a week's out, leaving the situation open for a new-comer, which is convenient.'

'How shocking!' I exclaimed.

'They ain't all bad,' the fellow continued. 'I know of a little modest one called the St. Giles's mission, which does a lot of good. But what too many of 'em do is this. They give their own officials high salaries, and allow themselves swell offices and lots of gas, and make a parade of pretty promises which they are utterly unable to fulfil. That's about all they do, as you'll know for sartain when you've been a inmate of as many prisons as I have.'

I was trembling with passion, for this grim recital made me sick. My nerves were stretched to extreme tension. To keep myself quiet I drove my nails into my palms.

‘Is this really and truly what is done?’ I cried out. ‘No doubt it is difficult to obtain employment for men who wear the gaol-brand; but surely it would be only honest to refund the money to men who are so heavily handicapped, when work is not to be obtained? They must know by their own experience that they are spending the money to no purpose. Where’s the charity, and what becomes of the subscriptions?’

‘Some are better than others, as that bloke said,’ Jaggs observed. ‘There’s one at Glasgow, I believe, that does wonders, and another at Leeds. But as a rule, they’ve no business to exist; for they accomplish nothing. They spend our money no more advantageously than we would for ourselves; and as for giving anything extra, they haven’t got it to give. They’re always wanting to try and do what they can’t do. For instance, they want now to get the clothing of the men who come out into their hands; and it stands to reason that they could not manage that as well as the prison people can, for they’d have to charge something for make and sewing and that, while the prison people

get it all done by prison labour. If you don't believe that what I say is strictly true, ask any old lag here at Dartmoor, or in any other convict prison, for that matter. They all have the same tale to tell; and it ain't much to the credit of these charitable coves.

I was going to say more, when I found myself suddenly prodded in the back. The all-important topic had drawn us all from our work. The peach-faced jackanapes, not knowing what to do, had left us alone for a few minutes; but now, it having been signalled to him by the sentry on the watch-tower that somebody was coming, it behoved him to act promptly, for his own sake; so he prodded me in the back as his usual victim, and shouted in a great fluster:

: You're at it again, are yer, 122? You're always at it. Talking and chattering and misbehaving; and now you're getting up a mutiny. It's like your imperence to gather them all around you under my very nose. What is it to be—escape or murderous assault? One or t'other, I'll take my oath! You are a bad un, and no mistake. You'll be a 57 by-and-by. The canary-dress would

suit your complexion; you as are for ever chirping. But I'm up to your tricks, you downy card! So sure as I see the chief warder or the governor, I'll report you for attempted mutiny, as is the bounden dooty of a zealous officer. Why, if here ain't Mr. Scarraweg just in the nick of time! A bout in the cells on bread and water will do you a power of good.'

Overwrought as I was by all I had just heard, and unusually nervous, I turned fiercely on the buzzing insect, and in another moment should have knocked him down. Soda egged me on with nod and gesture; but Jaggs, the lithe and nimble, flung himself between us.

'Good God!' he said; 'take care. Do you know that this means the triangles and the cat? You're mad, and I don't wonder at it. You'll get callous by-and-by, as I am. But keep your temper, my good fellow, at all hazards. Keep your temper!'

He was right; and gulping down my wrath, I thanked him with a look. The cat! No, no! I could never survive that crowning disgrace! Though palsied and trembling all

over, I kept my fury in my grip, saying to myself as I bit my lips till the blood came :

‘This insect is beneath my rage. He’s a Jack-in-office, nothing worse ; a puny, prating busybody. I must be patient—very patient. After all, why should I ? This agony is greater than can be borne. The more I misbehave, the sooner will it be over. For my Mildred’s sake it is best that I should never leave the tomb ; lest haply some day, coming face to face with her, I should, in the yearning of my empty heart, blurt out that the felon is her father. No ! it behoved me wilfully to commit excesses to secure my detention in my tomb !’

The peach-faced jackanapes was in deep conversation with Mr. Scarraweg, who, his bushy brows knit, was looking in my direction. I was to be punished ; of that there could be no doubt. What for ? what had I done ? That mattered little. Welcome punishment ; welcome even the cat ! The more often I was punished, the more horny would grow my cuticle.

In this mood I re-entered the prison with my party, and instead of tramping up to my

own cell on the third landing, was inducted to a dark one on the ground-floor, through a grating in which I could hear the muffled screams and songs and knocks and yells of fellow-miserables gone wrong; and there, groping for the bed-place, I sat down, once more in solitude, to chew the cud of my embittered thoughts.



CHAPTER VIII.

WANTED, A BUTTRESS.



S I was supposed to be on the verge of doing something deplorable, I was not sent to afternoon labour. The dapper little governor took the opportunity, therefore, of showing his pet wild beast to a squire who had dropped in from Tavistock. As they came down the passage I heard him say—you could always hear him half a mile off except when he was on ‘the war-path,’ as he called it :

‘This is a fearful specimen, sir—a frightful specimen! It’s impossible for me to find words to describe this man’s character; but you shall see him for yourself, though I assure you, on my honour, that in his presence I am in terror of my life. He’s

capable of anything. You can't say "Boh!" to him without his yelling out imprecations and blasphemies and obscene language. He's an Atheist. I never asked him, but I'm sure he must be.'

It tickled my sense of humour to hear myself thus described ; for the little gentleman fully believed what he was saying. He had a way of docketing people off-hand ; and having thus docketed them, resented it as a personal affront if they failed to carry out his predictions.

'He'll take my life, sir, some of these days, I know he will ; but I must take my chance of that, sir, receiving as I do my country's pay. Be careful, and stand behind me when the door's opened. I'll protect you, never fear.'

And he went through so many ceremonies in the way of reconnoitring before he did have the door opened, that, unable to contain myself, I laughed aloud. At that moment he was observing the caged monster through the Judas-hole, and when my harsh cachinnation brayed forth out of the darkness, his grey eye disappeared like a sodawater-cork sent flying

away into the air. Then there was a whispering and a call for more warders, 'in case, you know, etc.,' followed by a rattling of keys and fumbling of locks, and then the shooting in of a ray of sunlight whose apparition made me blink. In the middle of the ray stood the little major, like the ghost of Hamlet in the limelight; and, seized by a kind of devil-may-care waywardness of jesting, I observed sepulchrally out of the darkness:

'An angel visited St. Peter in his prison. Are you a spirit of health, or goblin damned? Anyway, have you come to let me out?'

This was rude and disconcerting, and before a stranger too. The major was not pleased at all, so he roared in a voice of thunder:

'Stand at attention at the end of your cell, sir; and lift a finger at your peril! You are a secretive vagabond, you know you are; an ally of the worst characters in the place. Know that the power of the law can reach even such as you, so beware! Remember, I have warned you. Just go on hatching

plots and perverting your fellow-prisoners, and see what'll happen. It won't do !' and then he stepped out of the ray of light, but, struck apparently by the weight of his remark, he stepped back again, and, repeating '*It won't do,*' shook his stick at the monster to cow him, and backed majestically out of sight. I have no doubt that the squire from Tavistock went home to the bosom of his family and electrified his daughter with descriptions of the human hyena in the dark, and vowed that the governor's salary ought to be doubled at least. Well, well. There are human hyenas enough, although I at that time was certainly not one of them. Old Scarraweg's lion face with its moth-eaten Newgate frill was turned from me during the interview *profile perdu*, and he fidgeted with the keys and passed his tongue round his lips, as though he had something to say but knew not how to say it. I was aware that he was a good man, if bluff, and given to gusts of choler ; and it struck me that he knew more than he liked to show. Was he sorry that I should fall a victim to the officiousness of a Jack-in-office ? Did he know any-

thing of the affair of Jack, the retriever? Had some prisoner told him of my indignant protest? Prisoners are always anxious to have something to tell, in hopes that from the telling some profit may accrue to themselves. Certainly his manner to me was not the same as it had been. What he meant to say must for ever remain unknown; what he did say was that I must be careful to control myself before the warders, and he further announced for my behoof that he would send the Scripture-reader to my aid. Then he banged too the door with extra clatter, and locked it viciously, as though drawing several tough back teeth, and left me in the dark with the astonishing conviction that he, the chief warder, thought better of me than the rest did. He was respectful, in his rough way, instead of suspicious. What did he know—what could he have learnt? The chief gaoler a friend! I must be dreaming to imagine anything so preposterously improbable.

A friend! That word recalled to my mind the remembrance of Mr. Tilgoe. If I might only have communed with him—a

clergyman, therefore why not?—instead of the Scripture-reader! I had had several interviews already with that latter individual, and could make nothing of him. We saw little of the chaplain in charge except at chapel, and were not sorry for that, being but too well accustomed to the perfunctory service of that class of gentry. Now, between myself and Tilgoe there were bonds in common. How long was I to be locked up where I was? How soon should I be again permitted to enjoy the delightful Sunday stroll? What if the jackanapes, as a stroke of spite, should so arrange us in the future that I should have to walk with Soda? And why not—what did it matter? On the whole it might be best to have that ruffian for a walking comrade, or the genteel but fishlike Jaggs, who seemed to take such pleasure in tearing away the shreds of self-respect and leaving me naked among the tatters of my delusions.

Whilst pondering in this lugubrious fashion, probing with a ferocious joy the extent of my misery, the door opened again, and the Scripture-reader occupied the ray of

light. He said nothing, never even strove once to pierce the darkness, but sat well away in the passage, within hail of a warder, in case I might fly at him ; and opening a big book upon his knees, droned out a chapter of Jeremiah. He was short, grey-haired, inordinately fat ; wore silver spectacles, had a subdued, silken manner and thick husky voice. I was amused by the insult of his conduct, for this was only a new phase of solitude in a crowd, with all the variations of which principle I was becoming amazingly familiarised. What could I be expected to have in common with this person ? He was a hypocrite, of course, who, in exchange for a wage, was content to roll out a Scriptural jargon by the yard. I was wrong. First impressions are snares. He was no hypocrite, only a stupid, rather timid, but well-intentioned man.

The words he read conveyed little meaning, but his faith was great and simple, and he failed to comprehend that the faith of others could, by any possibility, be less entire and complete without their souls being lost for ever. The words he read were those which wise

men have accounted sacred, and some of them were four syllables in length ; was not that enough for the honest pursy fellow ? Yet there could never be anything in common between him and one such as I, who was constantly burrowing underground.

He droned on and on till the chapter was finished ; then, perceiving that I made no hostile movement, he timidly surveyed the monster over his spectacles, who crouched now in the farthest corner of his cage.

‘ This is a sad thing,’ he purred, behind his hands, and pushing up his glasses.

‘ What’s a sad thing ?’ retorted I.

‘ That you should be so disobedient, and incorrigible, and mutinous, and lost to all sense of——’

Again I was impelled to laughter, and this second spectator of the monster’s antics retreated quickly as the first had done, and then returned by inches.

‘ Who told you I was disobedient, and incorrigible ?’

‘ The warder in whose charge you were.’

‘ Is his word gospel ? A presuming young fledgling of four-and-twenty ; too ignorant to

be fitly entrusted with the welfare of others ; too flighty to command himself. The world has cast me out, has herded me indiscriminately with the vilest upon earth. I could accept the ostracism if I were not also condemned to be insulted by the lowest varlet on the premises.'

'I mustn't listen to such talk !' the reader said uneasily.

'And yet it's truth,' I returned with scorn. 'The idle accusation of one warder, who is little better than a boy, and may be a bully or personally vindictive, is to subject me to punishment—perhaps flogging—and I'm not to be heard in self-defence !'

'You can speak to the governor, or apply to see the director on his next visit, or even write to the Secretary of State. No one would dare to refuse you your rights.'

'Much use ! they would not believe what I say.'

'Convicts are finished liars,' he replied with unction ; then added more gently, 'The word of one whose character is blasted may not be adjudged of equal value with that of a presumably honest man. You have

to thank yourself for your position of out-cast. The results form a portion of your punishment.'

He was right, and I bowed my head in silence. Not with meekness though, for was it not another twist of the barbed dart in the wound?

'Depend upon it,' I observed, 'that there is a flaw here in prison management. Before a man comes to wear the felon's garb, he is so dead to all sense of shame, that his self-respect is entirely lost. That is the theory. Many a prisoner whom you class among the incorrigibles, is driven to desperation purely by mismanagement. There are felons (yes! among the crop-pated pariahs) *who might be put upon their honour*, and so led to perceive that they are not lost beyond hope. A discriminating and wise governor could soon tell which men to trust if he were allowed latitude; and Party 57 would not count so many members in its ranks.'

'There may be a drop of truth in that,' hemmed the puzzled Scripture-reader as he rubbed his fat hands together, 'but it would be a difficult principle to work. A convict's

word cannot be taken before a warder's, can it ?

‘Directly, no. If your warders were all well-trying persons of over forty—say non-commissioned officers, who had learned to obey, and were already accustomed to handle men—you would find us far more docile. Many a one may be led, where he can't be driven.’

‘Ah ! well—yes—no doubt,’ acquiesced the reader, who suddenly woke up to the fact that the monster was lecturing him instead of he the monster, which was indecent. ‘I am glad I have talked you into a better frame of mind. Now, if I go and ask the chaplain to tell the governor of this happy turn, and beg him as a favour to forego the remainder of your bread and water, will you promise no more to offend ?

‘I have yet to learn that I have offended. I've not yet been tried,’ I returned sharply.

‘Yet to learn ! Dear, dear !’ he replied, raising his hands and preparing to beat a retreat. ‘You'll go before the governor to-morrow morning. You won't promise not to quarrel with the warders ? There can be no

denying that they must have a hard time with stubborn men like you !

‘If I am put upon my honour and trusted to speak the truth, the governor will find me amenable, so long as the peculiarities of my temper are respected.’

‘Bless my soul !’ cried the horrified little man, ‘making conditions too ! and with the governor ! Do you expect me to carry such a message ? No doubt you’ll turn out to be a malingerer, or something shocking. A sly rascal with insinuating ways. You nearly took me in—nearly took me in, in spite of your hangdog look. Your words are clever ; so were the devil’s. Bless me !’ and so, fussing along the passage, blown along by his own sighs, he left me to my ruminations.

Out of the gloom of the punishment-cell had appeared a tiny speck, which might have grown into a beacon ; but it was stifled ere it grew, and vanished, leaving my heart the sorer. It was a brilliant idea of mine, that of permitting a governor to put such men as he deemed fit upon their honour. Certainly, if I had been put upon my honour, I should

have succeeded in retaining some shreds of the self-respect upon which Jaggs was operating with such craft. If they would only save me from sliding, instead of pushing me down the incline, I might come—having bade an eternal adieu to the world without—to await my end in tranquillity, much as though I were a Trappist. Decent food, warm raiment, a sufficiency of healthy work, a clean, well-ordered cabin, where I could reflect and read my books—what more could such as I desire who had reasons for wishing to remain in durance? To practise again my art—to woo again the goddess before whose throne I used so lovingly to worship? No! Never again. All that appertained to my former self over whom I had sung the requiem. Not to Ebenezer Anderson—Y 122—who had never been anything but a day-labourer. Here was actually a vision of content—as amazing as shortlived—and with its flitting came a whirl of wrath, succeeded by an access of derisive callousness. Honour and trust! Fool that I was even to remember the sound of such empty words. It was no matter for surprise

that those in power should deem them incompatible with a prison! What did Soda know of honour and trust, or Jaggs, or the ex-soldier now? Those and such as they were the men for whom, in theory, our prisons have been built, to whom existence in prison becomes second nature. Well, the prison was to be my home. Why linger yet before imitating their example? Like a shivering bather on the strand, I dipped in a toe and drew it out and plunged it in again, and hesitated to follow with the remainder of my body.

With the gaze of Scarraweg upon him, the peach-faced one prevaricated and contradicted himself as to the mutiny, and got so scolded by the governor as to hate me all the more; and I was quit of my punishment after three days of bread and water as a warning.

The following Sunday, my mind still brooding over the foregoing train of thought, I beheld the serene face of my friend illumined with a smile as he took his place by my side as usual, and we commenced our exercise. It was a lovely day, and the

soothing influence of the soft clear sky, combined with that of Mr. Tilgoe's dumb sympathy, quieted my tempest-racked spirit. For awhile we walked round and round the yard in silence, and I knew by some subtle, mental telegraphy, that though my companion spoke not, he was grieving for my trouble. What sympathy, oh my brethren, is so sweet as that between two friends which needs not to clothe itself in words? Is not this why we all of us take pleasure in the company of animals? In moments of overpowering grief have not many of us twined our arms about a favourite hound or a favourite horse, and obtained comfort from a fancy that the animal was inwardly propounding unutterable sentiments of consolation. Possibly the favourite's ideas were concentrated on his dinner, and it was only our own inner self that sympathised. Yet the contact with something living, which did not indulge in platitudes, was in itself a comfort, and beneficial to our stormy souls, which have at such times to pass through a phase of tempest ere they can again be calm.

The rapt gaze of the Reverend Aurelius

was striving to pierce ætner. I was the first to speak.

‘It seems an odd question to put to a clergyman of the English Church,’ I said. ‘But don’t you wish you were a Buddhist?’

He glanced down sharply ere he answered, ‘Why?’

‘Because it is the most comfortable of all creeds. The promise of deliverance from a painful existence, of a place in Nirvana, the Heaven of Oblivion! No sitting with harps on clouds, but rest, entire and eternal.’

‘That is the longing of a desperate soul, dear friend,’ returned my companion. ‘Remember that convicts like you and me, who are supposed to have been guilty of hideous crimes, would not be admitted to Nirvana. The position of a lifer would be nothing to what we should have to undergo. According to Buddhist faith, every single act of virtue receives its reward, every single transgression its punishment. The boon of annihilation must be won. The Buddhist must age, die, and be re-born, and go through lives without number, becoming more perfect in each, till at last he is so upright that by

his own merit he wins the boon of non-existence. Convicts, I fancy, would have many lives to live ; habituels, like that great fat Soda there, would be having their heads cropped for ever and for aye.'

A suspicion crossed my mind that the friend on whom I hoped to lean was laughing at me. Surely this could not be so.

'I cling to the theory,' I persisted. 'From the annihilation of new birth must result the annihilation of decrepitude, of suffering, lamentation, sorrow, regret, despair. And so we should arrive at the annihilation of the world, which is a mass of sorrow.'

'You are morbid, my dear boy, morbid !' replied Mr. Tilgoe, with just the faintest shadow of contempt. 'I am a practical man, although a clergyman, and consider that, being placed on earth, it is our business to attend to the world's affairs.'

'But we are excluded from the world,' I observed timidly, for somehow my castle in the air seemed crumbling ; 'and being so excluded, surely all that we are able to see above the prison-walls is the pure sky, beyond which lies heaven.'

‘No doubt, no doubt,’ returned the Reverend Aurelius. ‘But remember that your condition and mine are different. At the end of my ten years’ sentence I shall only be middle-aged ; so I’ve other things to think of besides heaven. And upon my word, the people in these places do little towards leading us up there. That chaplain’s views are shameful. It’s as much as I can do to sit still and say my prayers. I’ve offered to help him in his ministry in return for trifling privileges, but he declines my help. I even suggested that my time would be more profitably employed in compiling a new hymn-book such as should go to the hearts of these scoundrels here, instead of being frittered away in vexatious tailoring, and he snubbed me—actually snubbed *me* ! I’m not a garotter, or a murderer (I beg pardon, I didn’t mean to say that),’ and I might be trusted more than all this scum.’

My friend’s words jarred upon me. It appeared bad taste in him to be so apt to call his fellow-convicts names. I had already observed that those convicts who are most ‘down’ upon their brethren in misfortune are

pretty certain to be themselves amongst the worst. Tilgoe was a good man, and a clergyman, though not so good, I feared, as I had ventured to hope. Assuredly, placed as he was, compassion would have been more becoming than denunciation. Yet, which of us is so perfect as to be justified in expecting perfection in another? Judge not, that ye be not judged. Here was I, falling into the same error. Eagerly therefore I took up the theme he had just broached, a theme over which I had brooded much of late.

‘Ah! There it is,’ I remarked. ‘*Trust*. Of course it seems paradoxical to trust a convict an arm’s length. He must have done something very bad before he becomes one of us. But does it follow, that because he is guilty of one crime he should be capable of every enormity? Every rule is proved by its exceptions, and to this rule there are many exceptions. Take my own case. I will conceal nothing but my name. I got mad drunk, and unconsciously did that from the thought of which my soul recoils, and would have recoiled at the time if I had known what I was doing. It is well that I should be

punished, but my punishment has been inaccurately weighed. I would scorn to steal a purse ; nor would I (if properly treated) tell a lie. I acquiesce, for family reasons, in the propriety of my being put away and speedily forgotten ; but by reason of my surroundings here this is not a mere earthly death, but hell ; and I dread lest I should become a devil.'

The Reverend Aurelius looked at me with impenetrable calm. How different was he to me ! Perhaps, after all, he was as incapable of comprehending me as the others. How placidly at rest his spirit seemed, whilst mine was bruising itself against the bars !

'I'm afraid that quite privately in whispers between you and me we must admit,' he said with a tranquil smile, which somehow I didn't like, 'that the principle which guides the system is a good one. All large systems must be framed for the general body ; the few exceptions must be content to suffer. If we stopped the machinery to consider every pebble, it would speedily get out of order ; the gear would snap, and we should tumble into chaos. I admit this to you, but not to any-

body else for all the world. Sneakishness is the corollary of slavery, and sneaks must be governed with a rod. You and I are of course not sneaks—present company is always excepted—but all the rest are. I cry out that I ought to be trusted, because it is a plausible grievance, and because it annoys the chaplain whose smug face I can't abide; yet how are they to know which of these men to trust? You cannot judge by appearances or by demeanour, for the most soapy of these scoundrels are the least trustworthy. I remember a story in point, of a Victoria Cross officer, who in a moment of peril saved a whole regiment from destruction by his own bravery alone. Yet this same man bound his extremities every morning with diaculum plaster in order to have a pretty foot, and gave orders on his deathbed to have his cheeks rouged, in order not to appear to a disadvantage before the undertakers. In ordinary everyday life we find people as paradoxical as this, in whom extremes seem to meet. How much more so then in prisons, where characters are twisted and distorted, mental attributes jumbled and awry! There's a person

yonder, now—he whose yellow facings show that he has reached the second class. He is a highly educated man : was a wrangler or some such thing, and afterwards studied as an architect. If education could be counted on for anything, he should be trusted as soon as you or I. If you spoke to him you'd say that butter would not melt in his mouth. Well. He had not been here a week before he asked to go before the governor, and being so mealy-mouthed they forgot to search him first. As soon as he was in "the presence," he produced a great stone from his breeches, and heaved it at the sacred head ; but unhappily—I mean fortunately—it only smashed a clock. Would you trust that gentleman ?

‘Certainly I would. Had he been placed upon his honour at once, instead of being worried and tormented out of his life by ignorant Jacks-in-office about trifles, he never would have been frenzied into throwing that stone.’

Mr. Tilgoe shook his head.

‘You reckon without the crookedness of certain natures. There are men whom no amount of education can save, who revel in

mud, and take pleasure in plunging into infamy. How about 57 Party—would you trust them ?

‘ In their present state, of course not. I would keep them in solitary confinement till their irritable natures were tamed ; then I would treat them as if they were human, and give them good advice.’

‘ Come, come !’ cried the Reverend Aurelius, with a laugh like a creaking door-hinge. ‘ Good advice. Do you like good advice yourself ? Would you like me to preach a homily to you this minute, although you’ve just been tamed yourself with three days of bread and water ? Either I misjudge that lowering frown of yours, or you would turn round at once and use bad language. I speak openly to you, as I would speak to myself, for I have read your character : you are a sensitive, refined man, quivering under as many arrows as St. Sebastian. You hate and loathe everything and everybody here as much as I do. You are a turbulent fellow, with a fiery temper. You are prepared to war against everything and everybody, out of sheer hate and disgust. Why then wear a mask with

me? We are admirably fitted to be companions if, to begin with, we throw our cards upon the table. I want a real comrade; so do you. You think well, though you are inclined to be morbid, and you do not talk badly. You are the very man I've been looking for to assist me in my book.'

'Your book?' I echoed.

'Yes,' he went on in fascinating tones like those of an *Æolian* harp. 'I, like you, am a felon, though I ought not to be; and therefore, I too am savage, though I have too much wit to wear my heart upon my sleeve as you do. There was a small mistake—a trifling but unfortunate scrap of paper, but never mind that—a little stumble in the career of, well, I think I can afford to say, an honest man, for up to middle age my conduct was white as samite; and it's my intention, when I get out, to retaliate upon the beasts who've kept me under lock and key. For a second, the impassible smile gave way to a look of concentrated rancour which fairly took my breath away. It was like forked lightning on a dusky night. Then he continued as serenely as before: 'Excuse emo-

tion. The display is childish, but I can't help it, for I feel deeply if I don't show much. I'll have my revenge; and I'll worry the authorities till they'll wish they had never set a finger on me. It's not a wise thing to pick up red-hot coals. How do I mean to do it? This way; and I flatter myself it's ingenious. I'll write a book, purporting to describe minutely the working of the prison system—abusing the governors, accusing the deputy-governors of being useless dandies; pitching into directors, doctors, warders. Not *en bloc*, you know; not such a ninny as that. The mouths of the authorities will perforce be closed, for it isn't dignified to wrangle with convicts, and the public won't know that the story I relate is not strictly true. They've not been locked up, and they haven't taken the trouble to look into matters. So how should they know? The public won't believe it? Oh, indeed! I'm afraid, my dear fellow, that, for a convict, you are alarmingly innocent. You forget, that if two-thirds of the earth's inhabitants were not born idiots, sharpeners would not exist. Besides those who are hopeless donkeys

from their birth, there is a large contingent of foolish people who take what they read for granted simply because they are unequal to the task of thinking for themselves. Then there is the lazy contingent, to whom thought is a bugbear and a bore. If I do my work skilfully (and I depend on you for valuable assistance, for though, poor fellow, you have little hope of getting out yourself, it will be a comfort to be assured that the enemy is dancing on hot bricks)—if we do our work skilfully, I say, the public will put faith in every page. As an educated person you will have observed the odd fact long since, that the respectable British cit has a hidden kind of interest in all that concerns crime and criminals, although he'd rather choke than own it. Just as he has in the exploded but noble art of self-defence. Many a speckless churchwarden, who stands demurely twice every Sunday in a doorway with a plate, would give half his whiskers any day to be able to attend a prize-fight on the quiet. So is it with the careers of felons. In the last century, as I need not recall to one as well informed as yourself, fine ladies made no bones

of doating upon highwaymen, and weeping on their breasts in Newgate—the dear delinquents. Hence the *furor* for the Beggar's Opera, which in itself was a poor thing. Now Mrs. Grundy is too severe ; besides, the highwaymen didn't have their heads cropped, and the felon's fustian is not so becoming as a scarlet coat. Yet I'll bet you anything you like, that the fashionable fair will gloat over a convict's book ; and seeing him only through the medium of their own rose-tinted simplicity, will never dream but that all's as true as the Gospel. Remember, that to gull the empty-headed you have only to repeat a thing six consecutive times—however preposterous it may be—to immediately ensure a following of some kind. Suppose now, that I say a thing *in a book* (I, a mysterious interesting convict, who will begin by premising that my offence was venial); there's a point gained at once, *because it is in print*. Then there will be reviews ; and reviewers, having no means of verifying facts, will gravely take them for granted, and review accordingly. Then I take another step to build up the edifice which is to squash these

beasts. I corroborate in the newspapers what I've said in the book, pretending, of course, to be some one else; and others will be sure to do the same. Then people—warders and so forth—if I can only anger them sufficiently, will attack me with blundering pens, and the papers will teem with accusations, and public indignation will be fairly roused against the sybaritic sinecurists who dawdle about and do nothing but draw salaries; and then there will be radical leading articles on the subject; and by cleverly fanning the flame, those pigs in the Home Office, who have dared to keep me in this filthy place, will quake and shiver in their shoes and bite their nails; for they will be powerless to defend themselves, and the public will be convinced that they are Neros.'

The lively picture so artistically sketched by the Rev. Aurelius Tilgoe amazed as well as dazzled me. The last barrier of reserve was swept away, and I beheld with misgiving quite another individual from that whom I had seemed to know. Had everybody within these accursed walls two faces as well as a double life? I was so astonished at

this new view of the man whose example and exhortation were to keep me on the straight and narrow road that I could only look on, petrified ; and presently he went on again :

‘ Much is to be gained from the romantic side, you see. Lady Clara Vere de Vere will toast her dainty feet by the boudoir fire and dry her aristocratic orbs with a square inch of laced cambric in sympathy for the dear delightfully wicked convict’s trouble—the picturesque one, of course, who has shown daring and ingenuity ; not the one who jumped upon his wife with hob-nailed bluchers. And I will work upon the feelings of John Bull, her papa, by babbling about the British tax-payer. Appeal, my friend, to a woman’s romance and to a man’s pocket. Dive into statistics, which the outside public have no more opportunity of verifying than the convict writer has, and alarm John Bull on the score of £ s. d. We all know that whether convict labour pays or not is beside the question, though it is well that it should pay, if possible. Convicts unfortunately exist, and will continue to be a burthen upon honest men, and they must be employed in

the manner which may seem most convenient. Yet a good deal of showy capital—or, between you and me alone, shall we say claptrap?—may be wrung out of the word *taxpayer*. “If so and so were done it would lighten the burthen of the taxpayer;” or “In the interest of the taxpayer I would suggest;” and so on! You have no notion how well that looks in print. With that magic shibboleth you can do what you will. A wily suggestion which holds out to A or B a chance of getting something sixpence cheaper, no matter at what risk of being served with inferior quality, touches the sordid spring which governs the nature of mankind. “Taxpayer” is the bright scarlet carrot on the end of the stick which will make the donkey gallop as we list. This sounds cynical, my dear boy, but it’s none the less true, for all that.’

I grew more and more surprised. Was this indeed the meek-eyed but Reverend Aurelius? It was the security of the revenge which he was plotting that kept him outwardly so calm. Like me he had a raging fire within, but was more skilful in covering it over. All his thoughts were centred on

his purpose, concentrated in the culling and weaving together of facts which, if placed alone, would present one aspect ; but which, if deftly combined, would display quite another. It is a frightful thing to consider that an excellent man's better nature may become so distorted as to batten only on so foul a fruit. Maybe, if at first he had been treated less like an animal ; if he had not been pushed roughly down the hill ; his imprisonment, by purging his soul from its weight of bitter stuff, might indeed have been an atonement for his sin. What really was his sin ? I caught myself thinking. He said something about a bit of paper. Forgery, no doubt, to which he was driven by a compelling network of fortuitous circumstances, over which he had no control. But perhaps he was deceiving me in this. Heavens ! in what a world of deceit and lying I lived. He did not pretend to conceal from me the fact that he was prepared to lie largely to spite the authorities, and with the worst kind of lying too, which sprouts from a grain of truth. Hence his respect for truth was infinitesimal, although he was a clergyman. Were all

convicts really liars? Do they necessarily become so when they don the mustard garb? With dismay, which brought with it a still heavier weight of desolation, it was clear to my understanding, from whose vision scales seemed to fall, that the Reverend Aurelius was not the friend who was to hold out the helping hand. Woe was me! Was I then utterly helpless and forlorn?

The light was waning. The time allotted to the Sunday walk was nearly past. Tilgoe, perceiving how dejected and how disappointed and moody I had become, changed his tactics with a rapidity which was bewildering. He commenced, with an airiness such as would have done no discredit even to the inimitable Jaggs, a sarcastic commentary upon the chaplain's last discourse. It was clever, he said; very clever, but shallow, and the divinity puerile—quite beneath contempt. He could not quite bring him to book, as his memory in such matters was apt to fail him; but certainly should make bold to argue certain points with the chaplain the next time he met him. If he only had Scott's Bible by him now, or even Alford's, with those in-


valuable notes, and so on and so forth ; till I broke shuddering away. But before I could escape he plucked me by the cuff, and whispered :

‘ You’ll have the scissors to-morrow night, and we’ll chat while you cut my hair. Consider the matter at your leisure, and think out a good grievance or so for the Great Book !’



CHAPTER IX.

EBENEZER TO THE RESCUE.

 F what little things is a convict's life made up! The extra thickness of his broth or the thinness of his gruel are grand events which mark a difference between day and day. The monotonous millwheel of our Dartmoor life moved slowly round—so slowly and so regularly as to seem without any motion at all. We dated events from our punishments. 'Such an event occurred the day F 52 was flogged,' or 'So and so was taken ill the last time B 60 was on bread and water.' We were like children in a harsh condition of *status pupilaris*; worries, which in the roar of the outer world would have passed unnoticed, were to us awful troubles—great griefs which wrung our

hearts and stirred us to our centres, as infants are stirred.

The peach-faced warder was a sore trial to many under his care besides myself. When we went to the bath he hustled us; when, in the course of search, he had to rub us down, he poked his awkward knuckles into our ribs; when we swept the landing outside our cells he yelled at us. The martinet ways of the little governor were reproduced in exaggerated shape by him, till I wondered that no one stuck a knife or a nail or something sharp into his weazen. But no one could be more affable to him than Soda or than Jaggs. Of course they had a motive for what they did. Had they entered into a compact with the jackanapes; and if they had, how did they manage it?

We occupied the end cells on the third landing of Hall E; small cells like ships' bunks, lighted each by a square of glass a foot and a half high by six and a half inches wide. These cells were separated by partitions of corrugated iron, through which the voice could be heard dimly. We knew better, however, than to communicate by means of

speech, for if we could hear each other, so could Cerberus on the landing, and that would have been followed by a report and an empty stomach. No; we conversed together by means of a code of signals—little taps on the iron with a tin dinner-knife, like the sounds which a medium makes with his toes when introducing us to the ghost of our great-grandmother. Soda occupied the cell at the extreme end, and it was a scene of intermittent turmoil. His ways of going on varied unaccountably. When the peach-faced one was off duty he was always up to tricks; howling or shouting or singing songs about the governor, who was considerably exercised as to what to do with him now that he was put to labour, for he was indifferent as to bread and water, and professed to enjoy mightily a dark abiding-place. Soda's good manners were quickly waning, and he showed signs of resuming the evil practices of his last lagging in the matter of torn blankets and broken windows.

Next to him came Miffy, who likewise showed signs of disimprovement, as the influence of his neighbour grew on him. Little

by little his meagre wits fell more and more under the sway of Soda, for whose orders he lay in wait, with a respect tempered by terror. He was always in trouble, was that luckless stamp-stealer; and with each new punishment his mind grew more vacant—his dazed devotion to this brutal tyrant more close and undivided. Miffy's sole interest and amusement was the contemplation of his home-letters. Of an evening, when others read their books, or attended school—a farcial arrangement whereby the ignorant are supposed to imbibe the three R's—he drew from between the pages of his Bible a few worn and dirty scraps, whereon his poor wife had poured out her loving heart, and read and re-read the tender words, each syllable of which must, if he had still possessed a memory, long since have been imprinted on it.

My duty took me down, sometimes of an evening, to place the desks on the floor of the hall below, for school; and I never shall forget the strange picture which all the tiny windows of the cells used to present—each with the blurred semblance of a face looming as out of a fog, through the fluted glass,

illuminated by the light of a flickering candle. Many a time have I looked through at Miffy (his cell was next to mine) ere I went in and closed my door. His head was always in the same position, moving slowly like clock-work, from side to side, as he followed, word for word, the dear lines of love, and pondered of those at home. Then I would turn away, and take refuge in my own cell with all speed ; for these letters of his reminded me of her whose existence I was always trying to forget.

These letters frequently got him into a scrape, poor fellow ; for he would sometimes take a furtive glance at the cherished documents, when he should have been scrubbing his tins, or sweeping on his knees. Soda railed and gibed at him ; the peach-faced one abused and bullied him ; but he bore all with patience as though he scarcely heard. As his cheek became more wan, his eye more vacuous, so did his hearing seem to go from him. Though my own nature was growing hard and stony under the influence of what I saw (and you may suppose that I was not sorry to watch the change), yet did I feel concerned for this poor creature. Was there no

more hope for him than for myself? Was he, indeed, to become Soda's drudge? It seemed so. The irradicable brand of the felon would be on him. 'Twere better for him, as for me, if like me he were never to leave these walls.

On the other side of me was Jaggs's cell, and beyond his again that of Mr. Tilgoe. Decidedly the genteel Jaggs was not a match for the vengeful Scarraweg. He remained at the quarry with the rest of us, and though he was careful to do as little as he could, yet his hands began to lose their suppleness. In the winter they were vulgarly red, and a mass of chilblains; in the summer they were sore and swelled, and blue. He became grave and anxious, even querulous. His infantine blithesome manner gave way to a demure sadness which hung like November fog about the seams of his furrowed jaws. Ruefully one day, and with a humility which, he told me afterwards, must have been '*navrant*,' he addressed Scarraweg in private as he passed. He had become so abject as to plead for mercy through the observation-hole! What a fall was there!

‘Sir,’ he said, ‘I beg leave to offer you a humble apology. If you’ll move me to a better berth than that cursed draughty quarry, I’ll never call you “uncle” any more. Come, I’ll do public penance if you wish it; and swear on my bare knees that there’s no tie of blood between us. Say the bakehouse—come, don’t be crabbed to a prostrate foe. I’m beaten. I’ll confess my discomfiture to all in the prison. Say the bakehouse like a brick!’

With a chuckle of satisfaction in that his vengeance had not missed its mark the chief warder went away; but the prayer of the suppliant remained unheard; whereupon Jaggs, wounded to the quick, became spiteful, and drawing inspiration from his spite, took to relating anecdotes about his aunt—fit partner for such an uncle—who, he averred, gave way to an eccentric habit of going to bed in the fireplace, with a bottle of strong waters for a pillow. Scarraweg ground his teeth, but declined to parley. Jaggs was at his wit’s end. Strange to say, he also was now frequently in trouble. He who was wont to pride himself upon keeping

his temper and behaving like a gentleman, was constantly appearing before the 'swell,' and under the oddest of accusations for one who was so exhaustively genteel. His candles disappeared with mysterious rapidity, and the circumstance did not escape his gleeful uncle, who pounced on him like a cat upon a mouse.

That Soda, and men of his calibre, should eat candles (and filthy offal, too,) was no more than was to be expected. Coarse beings of his low type are given to such unhealthy appetites; for snails and frogs and poisonous herbs lead to millennium in the hospital; but that Jaggs, too, should do so was a marvel. The fastidious Jaggs! He was a most unlikely person to be guilty of such a trick. Though he held his peace and submitted to correction, I felt perfectly convinced that he did nothing of the sort. He condescended to explain the matter one day to some of us. Before going to bed each night he was accustomed to rub his hands with grease, in the vain hope of keeping them in trim; for he was proud to relate in moments of expansion that in his hands his fortune lay—

not for the purpose of signing fictitious cheques, but for performing sundry evolutions with those curiously productive thimbles and that pea.

As we became better acquainted he dropped his affectation. Why play the 'infant' with us, except in the way of practice—he who at bottom was so far from infantine? He was no worse than the run of mankind, he explained one day to me—even though the honest lay had been given up for ever, after the abortive workhouse episode. His theories were different from those usually accepted, that was all. Robert Houdin and Professor Anderson did wonderful things with their hands, and an appreciative Upper Ten applauded them to the echo. He, Jaggs, also, did wonderful things with his hands—and also for his pecuniary advantage; and the world elected to hunt him down for it. Was there ever anything more egregiously unfair? He was in his way an artist. The skill of his legerdemain should be taken to wipe out its turpitude, if turpitude, indeed, there were, which he begged distinctly to deny.

Is not success in life made up of the hoodwinking of one struggling unit by another who is more astute than he? And does not the fact of our success in very many cases blot away with circumambient glory the means by which it was attained? Mr. Jaggs, whilst making believe to hammer at a stone, tried hard to persuade the neophyte that he was more martyred even than was I; but I had learned to know him now, as a sublime humbug—one of those labourers in the devil's vineyard who can, as the saying goes, 'coax a bird from off a tree.' So I listened with curiosity to what he might have to say, aware that he deserved his evil fortune as well as any of the flock at Dartmoor.

'What if your hands are spoiled?' I observed on one occasion. 'A fellow of such resource as you, can surely find some other means of making a living.'

'What! try the workus again?' he asked with a light laugh.

'That can hardly be expected, I suppose,' I returned, smiling; 'yet are there not other ways? Mr. Tilgoe, for instance——'

'The unfortunate little bit of paper, eh?'

laughed Jaggs, quietly. 'Are you taken in by that little bit of paper? My experience—and I've spent a good bit of time in these hotels—leads me to disbelieve the man who pretends to have been led into trouble by somebody else. No,' he continued, 'I should not do much good with the "bit of paper" lay. I'm a past-master in my own line; but a man can't cultivate more than one talent to perfection. You might as well ask Maskelyne and Cooke to write novels. But, good gracious!' he went on pettishly, 'I call it a disgusting world. Talk of man being a splendid creature! Isn't he told that in the sweat of his brow he's to eat bread? How contradictory it is! You, as an artist, will understand what I mean. People are bidden to go in for the higher aims of life; yet the higher aims all cost money, and bring precious little in. Now, my art is one of the few which cuts both ways, and folks pretend to despise it. It requires consummate skill that should command respect; and it fills my stomach at the same time; and yet they lock me up for practising it! You will agree with me that it's a de-

grading thing for the highest aims of our intelligence to be directed to the filling of our stomachs ; but so it is—and we can't help that—and in my little way I've not allowed my talent to lie in a napkin, for which, I suppose, I shall be rewarded in the next world. Why, then, since there is no denying that it is my special talent, punish me for making use of it in this ? Things are all wrong, and muddled about. Depend upon it, there's a screw loose somewhere. If we're to use our talents at their best, and not to expect to make money by them, we ought to be fed and clothed free gratis, as the great painters were in the middle ages. If they'd feed me and make me comfortable I'd promise never to pick another pocket, except for fun—and I'd always put back what I took out ; but there's the rub, you see. I've got to live by my speciality, and when I find a gold ticker in my hand I say to myself, "That stands for a week in Paris, my lad—with cham. *ad lib.* ;" and somehow it wheedles its way into my pocket instead of t'other.'

'Then you take the stomach to be the chief councillor of evil ?' I laughed. 'You would

be inclined to agree with the Egyptians, who when embalming took out the intestines as being the part of man wherein reside the evil passions, and set them floating in a box upon the Nile, far away from the corpse to which they belonged !'

Jaggs was quite sincere in his views. It had been clearly, if roughly, demonstrated to him, that for the gaol-bird who has no relations upon whom to lean there can be no reformation. As he distinctly put it, it was gilded infamy or honest starvation. His principles being, to begin with, by no means firmly rooted, and what little root they had having been half upwrenched by the successful proceedings of his city master, it was only natural that he should quietly accept the situation. By nature indolent, it was more satisfactory to cultivate what he was pleased to call his art than to follow the humdrum calling of a clerk. Without friends, without money, it was necessary—the idea of starving being rejected at the outset—to procure bread and butter (or rather, after that he had budded into an artist, oysters and champagne). To that end he had been endowed with long digits. It would

surely be a sin to let his intelligence lie fallow.

If ever there was a martyr to circumstance, Jaggs was that martyr. He simply followed the only calling that was open to him, and accepted the results which accrued from following it as one of the disagreeable concomitants of an ill-balanced globe. It was his interest to keep out of prison as long as possible, because he preferred chocolate and muffins for breakfast to skilley. But if it was preordained that a certain number of his breakfasts here below were to consist of skilley—'Va donc pour le skilley!' He would shrug his shoulders and eat the simple meal like a philosopher.

The ease with which, strengthened by philosophy, he bowed under the yoke of prison discipline, showed that circumstances had made of him a fatalist, and that he was just one of those artists who seem to be created to be fed and clothed 'free gratis.' He had brought to perfection the art of purloining unconsidered trifles, and of manipulating the little pea, and (as no true artist will ever abandon his art, however wealthy

he may become) was not prepared, on any consideration, now that he was past-master, to refrain from practising it in the future. But he was quite prepared to practise it innocently, without guerdon, if a philanthropist would only adopt him as his son, and guarantee for life a good dinner and purple raiment. What a singular outcome was this from the conviction which society had forced on him, that honesty, if once you fall, is the very worst of policies ! And yet it was a direct result in unbroken sequence from the first premise.

He was an easy-going creature, was Jaggs ; and it is quite likely that in the event of work (such as he was capable of) having been obtained on that occasion when he vainly sought it, he might have gone on quietly ever after. For then he had not at that time learned his art, had not become fascinated by the evolutions of the pea. Now it was different. He was unutterably selfish, as we know, but was not by nature a sybarite. His selfishness took the form of indifference as to how much he might injure other people. For themselves, he cared little for oysters and champagne, though he preferred them

to skilley. They were, if I may so put it, the handmaids of the art he worshipped; just as nectar and ambrosia are the 'local colour,' from a gastronomic point of view, of his betters, the gods. Philanthropists with crazes for adoption are not plentiful; and supposing that no such *dei ex machinâ* should think proper to intervene for the behoof of Jaggs, there was no hope of his ever being anything else than what he was—prison or no prison. The tide had come in his affairs; he had not been able to find the flood, much less to take it; and it rolled by—for ever.

If Jaggs was inclined to take things as they came, it was not so with Mr. Virgin, whose determination to resist even the semblance of being put to labour became more and more intense, while his turbulence increased crescendo.

Being quite certain by this time that it was intended to make use of those brawny arms of his, and to wring, willynilly, a modicum of labour out of him, he commenced a series of small fandangoes, just to pull himself together—a sort of preliminary canter

previous to serious business. He dressed himself in the small hours, and practised his favourite breakdowns in order to worry the night-patrols; shouted to them as they passed that the 'governor was on the prowl:' which remark invariably caused a panic, for the governor had a disagreeable way of making his rounds in list slippers at unexpected moments, to see if the night-watch was vigilant. In the daytime he would lie down sometimes at full length on the floor of his cell, and absolutely decline to obey orders.

What could his guardians do? He was too big and too burly to be carried like a child. He courted bread and water in hopes of becoming ill. There was nothing for it but to leave him alone till the mood passed; which it did quickly, for he was not fond of solitude. Once he set all the hall agoing by making a dash at the landing-rail, as if intending to commit suicide. There was a howl from the attendant warders, and a rush to prevent him from leaping over. He was hustled away by a cackling crowd, and for a brief space became a hero, for people came and stared

through the Judas-hole to examine the man who was capable of such rashness.

The only spectator who maintained his equanimity was Mr. Scarraweg, who merely chuckled, and exclaimed under his breath :

‘That swab’s too great a coward to be in earnest ! He’ll go any lengths except ridding us of having to look after him. He don’t mean to tread the plank—not he ! Never fear ! If they’d only let us birch his fat back now ! That’s the only way to knock the nonsense out of desperadoes !’

There was nothing that Soda was not prepared to attempt to annoy his guardians. But his mind was wayward. His ideas moved in wavering lines, starting off at a tangent in so unexpected a manner as frequently to defeat the object originally aimed at. His flickering intellect was like a lurid wick, which requires constant snuffing. In one thing only, as I observed, was he persistent ; and I began to marvel what was to be the result of his persistency. The tin dinner knife, which was part of his prison kit, was kept carefully sharpened. Did he contemplate an attack upon anybody ? No ;

not at present, at all events. He looked forward eagerly to mutton-days, in order to secrete the bones, commanding Miffy (whose cell was next to his) to do likewise. Then, with an ingenuity for which none would have credited him, he fashioned these bones into keys, wherewith to open his cell-door. These keys were curiosities of neat handicraft. Some people require moulds of wax before they can make a key. Not so our ruffian. When a warder swung our cell-key upon his finger whilst conversing with a mate, Soda would be watching it from under his swollen lids, and could imitate its peculiarities in bone with an exactitude which was marvellous. What were his intentions? I wondered, for he could not escape by merely opening his cell-door. The hall in which we dwelt was opened by quite a different key—one, too, whose size precluded its imitation out of a mutton-bone. Moreover, the iron grille was always kept bolted on the outside. If he did not intend to escape through the hall-entrance, why was he so anxious to have access to the landing? Except through the door, there was no possible means of exit, for the

hall was lighted by skylights over the centre, many yards out of reach of anything living except flies or spiders. Yet, when quiescent, he was always occupied over these toys, and I perceived with regret that the perfecting of them frequently got his neighbour into difficulties.

Miffy, in this matter as in others, was his *souffre douleur*, or scapegoat. If Soda wished to try his handiwork he tested it in Miffy's lock, not his own; so that when one day the too fragile substance broke, leaving a piece in one of the wards, it was Miffy who was punished for hampering his lock, whilst Soda was the gainer in experience. But Miffy was loyal—deplorably loyal—and endured without a murmur the punishment which the other should have borne; and Jaggs, perceiving this, took it into his head also to play the tyrant.

My sense of right was by this time so blunted that it took much to shock me. I knew Jaggs, whatever under other auspices he might have been, to be rotten to the core; and yet the discovery of this latest escapade filled me with such disgust that, forget-

ting prudence, I reviled him before all the party.

This is how it was. The unfortunate postmaster, as we know, had been sent into the quarry for the benefit of the fresh air ; but in spite of the ozone, his health did not improve. He grew weaker and paler day by day, till I seemed to see approaching dissolution in the greyness of his face. He was evidently not destined to complete his sentence. The ailing, helpless wife at home, whose letters he pored over so lovingly, was never to see him again alive ; and heaven was acting kindly to that unlucky household. It is better to remember our dear ones at their best, than by looking on them after death, in all the hideousness wrought by some fell disease, to lay up for ourselves distressing memories. It was best that the ailing wife should remember her husband as merely weak and foolish, and never behold him as a semi-imbecile, with the gaol-brand upon his brow. If heaven willed that he should sink and die before his five years were up, it would be well for all parties ; and yet it was the distinct duty of those in whose

charge he was to save his frail life if it were possible.

It was a marvel to me that Scarraweg did not remark his state, or the Scripture-reader, who professed to be much interested in him. But so it was, and always will be, in these large prisons. Where there are so many healthy persons eagerly clamouring out that they are sick, the really ailing, who are too patient or too despondent to make complaints, will always be neglected. Miffy continued to totter out with us every day to the quarry, and when there crawled about with a shovel which he could scarcely drag; but was so palpably unfit for work that even the jackanapes who so enjoyed his *rôle* of collie was fain to leave him alone.

Before the peach-faced bully, I told him that he ought to fall out and demand to see the croker, for which I was snapped up and roundly abused, and informed that I was matriculating for a 57. Miffy blushed pink, and answered nothing, merely looking shyly up at Soda, as though some understanding existed between the pair. The warder also looked at Soda, and I felt convinced that

there was also a compact of some kind betwixt the convict and his guardian. Had Soda 'squared the screw?' and if so, how? What was the understanding between the ruffian and his drudge? It was all intricate, and I could not make it out; yet I pressed the point. What were the poor fellow's symptoms? Did his chest pain him, or was it only weakness? And then, still looking at his master, the truth came out, and, swinging his leg with deprecating movement, while his grey face flushed crimson, he confessed in a whisper that he was hungry—oh! so hungry; and felt that he soon must die.

What did this mean? Several of the party glanced up with interest. There was no need to be hungry in the hotel, however the case might stand with agricultural labourers without. He was hungry, but it didn't matter, he whispered; and shrank away as if expecting a blow; but Soda understood no more than did the rest of us. Jaggs apparently did, for he grew confused and nervous, and whistled in a preternaturally airy way, and forgot himself so far as to ply

his pick with unaccustomed zeal. Looking from one to the other, the whole thing flashed on me ; and, despite the callousness of which I was beginning to be proud, I could have felled the cold-blooded scoundrel with pleasure ; aye, and have kicked his bony carcase on the ground !

Now Jaggs I knew (for he slept next to me) had been taken with an odd fancy for feeding the birds outside his window, and many a time I had been wakened by their chirruping, as they lustily sang out for breakfast. This amused me rather, for human inconsistencies are always an amusing study ; and what could be more contradictory than that this villain, who could deftly plunge a big pin into a dog, should be so considerate about the well-being of some birds ? That he was not a great eater, I was aware ; and yet to give away half his loaf each day was no little sacrifice, for prison rations do not err on the side of profusion. There are soft places in the most hardened, if we only can hit on them. Perhaps, though too proud to own it, he was sorry about the dog, and this was his way of atoning for the offence. But

now I saw it all, and the spectacle which appealed to my mental vision made me heart-sick. The fish-like, selfish, cold-blooded scamp! It was almost impossible to realise that for so small a motive one man could ill-treat another so brutally.

For weeks and months Jaggs had been stealing Miffy's bread day after day, merely to keep his hand in, so afraid was he of losing his mastery over his art. As practice in legerdemain, he had been filching his neighbour's loaves, and, the object gained, had got rid of them by feeding birds, regardless of the fact that he was deliberately starving his fellow-prisoner; and Miffy, in his turn, had held his tongue, supposing that his tyrant had required them. The plausible, wicked scamp! Here was a case in which he might have, as it were, picked a pocket and put the object back again. But no! what cared he for the pain he inflicted on another? Forgetting that it is unwise for felons to squabble among themselves, my wrath got the better of my prudence, and shouting out for the jackanapes, I called on him to see justice done for once.

He was taken aback, and, uncertain what to do, looked inquiringly at Soda, who with a sneering smile, which was full of menace, had fixed his glazed oyster-eyes on me in doubt. Presently he muttered half aloud, as if deeply disappointed :

‘ No better than a gentleman-lag after all !’ and addressing our guardian in a tone which had in it a strange ring of authority, bade him mind his own business, and take no heed of ‘ that there covan.’

The warder hesitated, and seemed to stagger as if he had received a slap in the face, and, to conceal his confusion, began to revile me, whereat the whole party jeered. It was plainer than ever that these two understood each other, and that he would even do as he was bid.

Miffy meanwhile was so stricken with terror at the result of having confessed that he had been starved, that he shrank behind a block of granite, and watched his tyrant with a wistful and long-suffering gaze which fairly maddened me. Impelled by rage, I flung the last scrap of prudence to the winds.

‘ You despicable, miserable cur !’ so did

the gentleman-lag address the peach-faced one in a whirl of scorn. 'You are for ever harrying and nagging and worrying those who try to do their best. You take a delight in getting the better class among us into disgrace. You place pieces of thread and inches of soap in our cells to make us lose our marks ; and when a real crime occurs you turn away your head to curry favour with your black-guard friends ! There is a secret understanding between these men and you. I know it as well as if you admitted it. And I hereby warn you that I shall inform the governor, no later than to-morrow morning.'

There was a general growl, as of a pack of hyenas. What ! betray to the swell that a pal had been lucky enough to square a screw ? Convicts are always only too ready to tell tales behind each other's backs, but then there is etiquette in these matters. They write hints on slates and leave them to be read. It was a vulgar and malignant precedent so openly to play the informer. The party was gathering round with threatening gestures, to show the gentleman-lag his place before he should have time to carry out his menaces.

What cared I if they all fell on me with spade and shovel ? I was lifted out of myself ; and besides, life was not so precious that I should cling to it. Miffy cowered down, becoming light-headed and hysterical. Soda grinned viciously ; Jaggs tried to laugh it off ; the young warder, more and more confused, looked sheepish and frightened. He glanced round as red as a peony, and murmured something, while his hands twitched, about how I had better 'Come on.' What would have next occurred it is impossible to prophesy. Something would certainly have happened wherein I should have come worst off, without, probably, achieving any good ; it was with a feeling of relief, therefore, as my senses returned, that I beheld the sturdy form of Scarraweg trotting round the corner.

Here was a godsend ! I would make my complaint at once, and whatever line the chief warder chose to take, my conscience would at all events be free of any participation in Jaggs's villainy. Undaunted by the beseeching murmur of cowering Miffy, as by the hostile way in which Soda spat upon his palm and grasped his pick, I repeated the

whole story yet again, with an addenda of suspicions.

The attitude of the stout old sea-dog humiliated me, for he merely glanced at each of us with a sardonic smile, as he listened and stroked his Newgate frill. I was a convict, consequently a liar. The warder would deny all I said, and my sneaking comrades would back him up, the fawning mongrels! What was the word of a convict against that of a warder? This particular one had reported me the other day for attempted mutiny. It was the natural outcome of a felon's malice that I should in return accuse him of trafficking with prisoners. The thing was as plain as it was commonplace. Mr. Scarraweg was used to convict's ways; was but too familiar with the black tortuous alleys of their diseased mental framework. I felt assured that he disbelieved my story; for he merely observed to the quondam peachen—now the poppy-faced—that it was curious how little power he possessed over his men; and casting on his abashed 'nevvv' a glance of contempt, turned on his heel, bidding Miffy and me to follow.

Once beyond the ken of the unruly crew, his visage underwent a change, and the softened expression passed over it which once before had puzzled me, in which a latent kind of respect seemed to have a part. As we walked along, his lion face was clouded, and the fronds of his moth-eaten Newgate frill stood erect, as doth the lionine mane of the monarch of the forest when his majesty is put out.

Presently he said, with gruff testiness :

‘You did right to speak out ; but that fellow will report you. Never fear. I’ll settle him. Those two men are among the worst we have, and will certainly do you a mischief if they can. And yet I don’t know. That Jaggs is such a queer mixture ! It seems strange advice for me to give, but I cannot recommend you to quarrel with your fellow-convicts. Drat ’em ! The only passion which we can’t control in them is spite. That’s always prodigiously developed ; and when they get up a private row they stab each other and go all lengths, and then there’s no end of worrit. As to this drivelling object here, he ought to go to Woking among the invalids ; but it ain’t my place to settle the likes of that.

That blessed governor's always prying after us—quite as much as he does after the prisoners; but, dear heart alive! he never sees, somehow, what he ought to see. When people pride themselves upon having eyes in the backs of their heads, they can never see straight. One pair in front is enough for me, for with them I take in quite enough ugly sights. It's the malingers that disgust me! Just as if it warn't bad enough to be laid up ill when the Lord wills it, without tempting Providence by shamming. There's that G 88 now, him as whinnies like a horse. He took the doctor in so completely, that he was put down for Broadmoor on the very next vacancy, and just as a trial we put him in the observation-cell. This morning he overslept himself, and forgot his part. Through a pane in the wall he was under observation without knowing it, and we could see he was as sane as you are.'

'Who told you that I was sane?' was my abrupt inquiry.

Mr. Scarraweg glanced up with the quick look of suspicious intelligence common to all who are responsible for the crooked-minded,

and then, lowering his eyes, remarked musingly :

‘Talking of rum customers, you’re as rum as any ; and you do bother me at times, sure-lie. But there’s good in you, I’ll stake my life, though you behave as bad now and then as any under hatches. Now I wouldn’t touch some of these porpoise-faced lubbers with the fine end of a marlinspike, nor trust myself alone with ’em without another within call ; and yet I’d not be afraid to lay out along of you on the forsel yard-arm in a gale of wind, for all your glum looks. Sometimes you’re like a fiend ; sometimes like a lamb. Believe me, it’ll be for your good to keep up the latter character.’

‘How about example ?’ I rejoined, dryly.

‘Some are put afore us as examples of what to avoid,’ was his curt reply.

‘Not so,’ I retorted. ‘If we were not less self-reliant than the run of mortals, we should not be here at all. If you can’t protect us from ourselves, save us at least from others.’

‘’Tain’t to be done, messmate ; ’tain’t to be done,’ sighed Mr. Scarraweg, as he dreamily

counted the twinkling tiers of windows which glimmered, like the eyes of ghostly sentinels watching our every movement, through the white haze.

‘Why not?’ I responded eagerly, for it was the first time the chief warder had condescended to speak with me, and I was anxious that his instinctive verdict should be ratified. ‘Give us shorter sentences, with solitary confinement all the while. That’s simple enough, and would be the saving of many; with wholesome work and books and no contamination from without. Less chance then of the breaking down of weak resolves. If our natures have become rotted we shall do no good, of course; but at any rate we shan’t lead others astray; and if they’re not, we shall, by constantly studying our blemishes, reform.’

‘It was tried once, and didn’t answer. Men were put away for sixteen months, and some went silly, some raving mad. Then the period was lessened to a year; then to nine months, which, as a general principle, is as much as can be done in solitude without risk. Why, as it is, the men that come to us from “separates” are thin and weak, and have to be coaxed a

bit, like horses whose limbs are cramped after a voyage. In Belgium they think otherwise, I know. They lock up a man for three years ; but then discipline has to be relaxed, so it would not do for us.'

'I should prefer it.'

'Relaxed discipline? I dare say you would.'

'No. Solitude.'

'I shouldn't wonder, my lad. But you must remember that we must take people's minds in parcels. What would be possible, perhaps, for one, would drive a dozen crazy. It's cases like yours that seem to upset the coach. You're dreadful sensitive—must have been rather a noosance, I should say, at home, before you qualified for one of ours. Difficult to please, I shouldn't wonder, as to garbage. Inclined to call names if the fish wasn't tip-top. Lord bless you! I see through you, though you're not easy to read. You're one of them as 'd keelhawl a fellow if he dared to sneeze ; given to book larnin' too, and that ; and so the system scrunched you like a black-beedle!' The contemplation of his own acumen mollified Mr. Scarraweg, so, the leonine mane

subsiding, he remarked in mild reproof :
' Why don't you pull yourself together, and avoid reports ? Why couldn't book-larnin' keep you straight ? What's the use of book-larnin', unless it can ?'

' What, indeed !' I sighed remorsefully, while Miffy trotted along beside us in a daze.
' We are all imperfect, sir, liable to be seduced. Even you have your price. Yes, you have ! Supposing your child were dying for want of a bit of bread. You'd steal it. Yes, you would ! Don't say you wouldn't ; for I, too, can read, and under your rough rind you are a good sort !'

I had struck a wrong note, having dropped by accident into the wheedling convict way. So he drew himself up, and answered rudely :

' Don't try to blarney me. You're talking rubbish. How about "public works" and paying for your keep ?'

' The shortening of our sentences would be important, sir, in the way of economy.'

' Shortening of sentences ! Ha, ha ! That's good from *you*,' he laughed ; ' why, you're a lifer !'

Was I likely to forget it ? I hung my

head in silence, and the grumpy old sea-dog was sorry to have wounded me.

‘Tell me,’ he asked, more kindly, ‘how it is that you can’t be a good boy? What do you expect to gain from insubordination?’

‘Lock me up alone, and I will promise to offend no more.’

‘There! There’s no good arguing,’ he blurted out in disgust. ‘You chaps will ask for what you can’t possibly have. Is it likely that the ship can be thrown on a reef to oblige an indiwiddle? If you like moping, the majority don’t. It’s all precious fine for an educated cove to like to be alone, who has heaps of things to think of besides his sentence.’

‘Then are we,’ I exclaimed, ‘we, the unfortunate educated, to be sacrificed and put through our punishment six times over to please the ignorant? You call that justice! It’s wrong-headed, inhuman. *Classify*, and divide us with discretion. That is the only way to make our sentences act equally. There might be some trouble about the subdivision, but it would be possible.’

‘You know as well as I do that we can’t

make distinctions,' returned the chief warden, growing warm. 'The Radicals would be up in arms, and with a show of reason. As it is, they're for ever dinning into our ears that there's one law for the rich and another for the poor, which is gammon! Classify! You'd like to have a table of precedence, I suppose, like the 'aristocracy. The Church to come first, I dare say, and a pretty bevy too; and then ex-officers of cavalry, according to their ranks; and then solicitors; and, at the tail of the procession, the gutter-snipes. A pretty job! If you don't like prison, you should have stopped outside. But there, there! I'm getting in a tantrum, and it isn't right with such as you. Go to your cell, and be a good boy. That's my advice. Classify, indeed! Pooh, pooh! Absurd.' The irate Scarraweg went foaming off; but thinking better of it, returned to the foot of the iron staircase, which in obedience to a gesture I was ascending, and beckoned me down. Though hot and red and rude, the look he darted from under his shaggy eyebrows belied all the rest. 'Be a good boy,' he grumbled, 'and keep a good heart. To-morrow you'll have to answer

before the governor for that kicking up of heels this afternoon—more's the pity; but I'll see if I can't settle it. Anyway, don't break out and then declare you're ill-used; but sit down and read a book till I send you the Scripture-reader.'

Verily, in this good man's opinion the presence of the pursy Scripture-reader was a panacea for every ill !



CHAPTER X.

INTERVIEWING THE GOVERNOR.



AT the end of one of our Halls, or buildings composed of cells, tier above tier, approached by iron balconies, is a small chamber, below the level of the hall, to which access is gained by a pair of stone steps. This room is called the Adjudication-Room, and is divided into two equal parts by a tall iron grille with a gate in it. The inner portion contains a table and a carpet; the outer one is adorned only by two footprints painted on the boards, which suggest in an odd way Man Friday. Behind the table sits that awful functionary the governor, at convenient times and seasons, to dispense summary justice; on Man Friday's footprints such prisoners place their

feet as have been reported or wish to make complaints, and thus stand each in his turn opposite the judge, staring straight at him across the railings. One by one they are called in from the knot which wait under a guard in the hall without, and whilst waiting are able to converse in whispers.

On the day following my foolish escapade—for what can be more foolish than for a slave to beard his driver?—there was a goodly group of us assembled round the door, warders as well as convicts. The peach-faced one was there, looking nervous; and several of his fellows, who were to be fined for being late on duty. Jaggs was there, infantine and unconcerned. The strange creature bore me no malice for the part I had played yesterday, or at least pretended that such was the case; for, though he found it convenient to be friends with Soda, he declared that it would never do for ‘gentle-folk to be at daggers drawn.’

‘We must give and take, old chap,’ he had said airily. ‘You are not more perfect than I am; for your temper, I am bound to tell you, is abominable! Do, my dear chap,

watch it, and try to keep a civil tongue in your head. As we have to live together, why not make a pleasant coterie? We shall all be the losers if we snarl. So let's shake hands, and say no more about it. *Pas de rancune*. Excuse my French—an old habit.'

Jaggs was philosophical, as usual. Soda was there too, utterly devoid of care, free from corroding memories. Blackbeetle Bet, whom his misdeeds had driven into the grave—who had burned herself like an Indian widow on the corpse of his possible reformation—was quite forgotten. He passed me, after that escapade of mine, with a strangely lurching step and squinting leer, as though he would have liked to have flown at me if my muscles had not said 'Beware!' But I was broad-shouldered as well as he, and crossing my arms, leaned against our landing-rail with a scornful smile as if to invite him to pitch me over. This was a challenge. He had taken to me at first because I seemed a promising recruit for his favourite battalion. But I had proved a failure—worse than a failure. Was I a braggart as well as a sneak? To satisfy himself on that point he passed

me yet again, and in passing stamped upon my foot. I did not withdraw it or make any sign. He looked into my eyes, I into his, for the space of a few seconds. In mine he read his man; so, blundering out, 'Beg pardon, old pal,' he wreathed his crumpet face in smiles, and, following Jaggs's lead, made up his mind to be good-humoured.

Though I had been guilty of a gross breach of prison etiquette, yet he felt compelled to admire my boldness. It was improper on my part, of course, to make a row and threaten to tell tales, but the offence was in some sort condoned by the fact that I had reviled a screw. The way to win the esteem of Mr. Virgin was by the route of insubordination. I had caused the peach-faced one to tremble in his shoes. That was well, and a good precedent. That this particular screw should be in Soda's pay was a secondary matter. It was fair and right that all screws, without exception, should be rendered as uncomfortable as might be.

Among the group I recognised, to my amazement, the Reverend Aurelius. Of what offence could that immaculate psalm-

singer have been guilty? Perhaps he was there of his own accord to lodge a complaint or make a statement. And yet that was scarcely likely, for my clerical friend was always meek and patient, and never made complaints except with regard to the chaplain's theology of a Sabbath. As I watched I was still more surprised to find that he was muttering with motionless lips to Soda, and anon to Jaggs. What possible bond could there exist between such very pellucid oil and such exceedingly unclean water? The trio were in deep confab about something; then Mr. Tilgoe walked up and down, apparently absorbed in thought; and by-and-by shuffled over to me, wishing me a bland good-day.

'Jaggs is much hurt by your behaviour,' he began. 'He says that you have taken to meddling. A grave mistake, my very dear friend. Never meddle in other people's affairs, and certainly never on the side of the authorities; for they won't thank you, and you'll only set your comrades' backs up. In the outer world we learn to mind our own business. Here we should do the same,

unless we happen to form one of an organised association, a limited liability company, as it were, established for the general good.'

Perceiving that I did not follow him, he proceeded in purring undertones :

'You and I have the misfortune to be gentlemen lags, and as such are in the false position of being distrusted by the others ; but that we should remain so depends entirely upon ourselves. It is the province of mind to triumph over matter. So soon as I arrived here I said to myself: "This is a beastly place, and these are beastly people ; but let me make the best of a bad job." So I set about making myself generally agreeable, writing letters for the illiterate, giving advice to the ignorant, and all that sort of thing, which is showy and inexpensive ; and the result of it is that in my quiet way I rule these men. You are going on precisely the opposite tack, and nobody will suffer for it but yourself. Distressing to be intimate with common thieves ? No doubt, no doubt. But they can be made useful. Doesn't ly Writ bid us be friends with the mon of unrighteousness ? Well, this

mammon is unrighteous enough, Lord knows! Now you, my beloved and chosen ally, are behaving atrociously — kicking against the pricks, which, believe me, is an asinine occupation, fit only for donkeys, who don't know better than to quarrel with their food. Virtuous denunciations from the top of a block of stone in the quarry are all very well if you have an appreciative audience—who should know that better than I, who am a clergyman? But situated as you and I are, such oratory is dangerous. It is a golden rule to suit your rhetoric to those who have to listen to it. Take warning from that chaplain's balderdash each Sunday, which—but never mind him now. Accept this word in season, and be prudent.

The exordium of the Reverend Aurelius was worldly-wise. He, a man of refinement, could condescend for peace-sake to consort willingly with the rascals amongst whom he had been thrown. Yet how hard it seemed that he should have been compelled to do so. The forced companionship, to which he submitted with a good grace, had already left its mark on him. The upright man, who had tripped

once, as he said, was already tainted; his standard of right and wrong lamentably lowered. That much I had learned with sorrow during our last interview. Oh, if he and I and a few more of the better sort could only escape this evil influence! But what use was there in giving way to such longing? Scarraweg had flown into a tantrum at the mere suggestion of anything so impracticable. My friend was sliding down hill, and so was I. It was sad to be aware of it, and to be unable to check our downward course. I looked on him no more as one who might uphold me, but yet with a melancholy, sympathetic interest. His opinions were deplorably unsound, yet were they fascinating, for they sat so oddly on him.

‘I who preach to you,’ he resumed in his calm way, ‘am fallible. I, even I, was caught in a stumble last night, but saved the situation by presence of mind. That devilish chief-warder nearly came upon some of my notes. By the way, with regard to the book, you are not helping as you ought. I am getting on first-rate, but the memory of man has limits; so, lest I should drop some

precious pearls, I make notes and transmit them to the custody of a friend—ahem! a lady friend—outside. How do I manage it? I see the question in your face. Bless me, how much you'll owe me by-and by! I'll take it out in assistance with the book. Learn, then, my young friend, and be respectful as you should, that the position in which I used to move has accustomed me to a servant. I can't possibly exist without a servant, and I've got a servant now, although I look as if I were only a common convict. Not that he blacks my boots or knocks gently to say through the keyhole that the shaving water's ready. Those amenities are unfashionable in this hotel, and we are all the slaves of fashion. No; my servant is not required to do those trifles. I dispense with them, but I insist upon his wearing livery—a most becoming livery of blue; and I'll thank you in the future not to ruffle his sweet temper, as is your objectionable habit. If he is insolent just tell me, and I'll stop it out of his wages; but don't wrangle and sour his temper, there's a dear fellow! It is not fitting that persons of our social standing

should quarrel with servants ; it's low. Another golden rule—remember it : It is as well to be quite comfortable, wherever you may happen to be placed. In this hotel we are called upon to rough it ; but do not let us rough it more than we can help. The period of my sojourn here happens, unfortunately, to be beyond my own control ; but it was necessary, in the first place, that I should procure a valet. I have procured a valet, whose comings-in and goings-out are unshackled ; who cannot be searched as I am daily. In other words, I possess a “screw.”

The eyes of Mr. Tilgoe fairly danced as he dilated with pardonable vanity upon the ingenious details of his plans.

‘ I discovered,’ he went on, ‘ from my neighbour Jaggs—a clever man, but not versatile—that the young warder upon our landing was to be tampered with. He and Soda had already wrung some concessions from him. Now, I argued, that young person is bumptious and vain, and given to petty nagging. I must compromise that young person, lest he should elect to annoy me in the future. Soda had had tobacco transactions with him—vulgar

transactions, which once past are done with, and not really compromising at all. When it was chewed and gone, how could Soda prove that he had given him tobacco? My scheme was much cleverer than that, and more complete. As I said just now, it was essentially necessary that I should be able to communicate with friends outside—friends who would keep my manuscript, arrange with publishers—get the battering-ram *en règle*, in fact, wherewithal the authorities are to be pummelled. So, choosing my opportunity, I hinted that for every letter posted, and for each one called for at the Tavistock Post-office, the young gentleman would receive five pounds. The young gentleman, I happened to know, has a sickly sister, who requires delicacies such as are dear at Prince Town, and his pay is small, while his fines are numerous. He therefore fell prone into the trap; and from that moment became my property. He dares not complain of me, lest I should be driven to denounce him to the governor. “Where’s your corroborative evidence?” the Swell would ask at once. “At the Tavistock Post-office,” I should reply. “On such and

such dates the officer had leave to go to Tavistock ; inquire of the postmistress if on those days he did not ask for letters addressed to such and such a name !” ’

I marvelled at the astuteness of Mr. Tilgoe. It was clear that if the vain young fool had permitted himself to fall into such a snare, he was bound hand and foot henceforward—was in the power of his too clever prisoner—and the more that crafty personage unveiled himself, which he chose to do to me with a *sang-froid* that was appalling, the more I felt how disagreeable a plight it would be to find one’s self in the hands of so unscrupulous a man. He permitted me to see through his veil, and I shivered at what I saw. He might but have made one slip, perhaps ; might have led an upright life till the unfortunate moment of his fall. But I was wrong in supposing that there was aught in common betwixt us. It was not his comrades here who had tainted him. His soul was black before the shadow of the prison darkened it. That was evident, and he did not take the trouble to hide it from me. He was of that better class who lead

others to their ruin—not one to be contaminated by the gaol-bird.

And why, I wondered, should he choose to make a confidant of me ? why take such pleasure in opening for me his ghastly cupboard ? How could I serve him—I, who was a lifer, whilst his term was a comparatively short one ? Then I reflected, with one of the red-hot twinges which were branding my nature slowly, that before so prone and broken-down a thing as I, it was idle to dissimulate. He admitted that I spoke well—was desirous of squeezing my brains for the behoof of his precious book. That was all. Should I help him, or should I not ? I had no grudge against my keepers. They merely did what they were paid to do. All I asked of them was to be left in peace. My mind was sinking into torpor. The companionship of my comrades in the quarry annoyed me less and less. It is wonderful how speedily and how completely we accept a new position. I began to know that my serfdom was conquering me ; that in a short time it would need but consistent gentleness to make of me a willing slave. In a little while, perchance,

my intellect would become atrophied. But what if, Tilgoe's warning coming true, my fellow-prisoners should hate and suspect me — worry me in indirect ways—stir the dormant fire before it quite went out? What if my gaolers too should exasperate me into some serious outbreak—that peach-faced jackanapes, for instance, who showed such native talent in that line? Would it not be better to buy him, as Tilgoe had done, upon my own account? How could I buy him—I who, having cut myself adrift from my relations, had no command of five-pound notes? A momentary surprise passed through my mind as to how Soda had managed to buy him. His pals outside were like himself. The proverb of 'Honour among thieves' is, like most accepted proverbs, of veracity more than doubtful. His pals would not trouble about him till he came out again and could be useful. By what means had he bought the warder? But how I did worry myself over other people's concerns. It didn't signify to me. For my own part, there was nothing for it but patience. If I had no grudge against my keepers—mere subordinates paid to obey

orders—I had a deep and bitter grudge against the virtuous, self-sufficient world who tied me to the stake. But the thought of that would not bear contemplating. There was no use in kicking against the pricks, as Tilgoe had wisely preached. The gnashing of teeth is but a futile pastime. I must set myself to make the best of my position. Everyone, even the humane chief-warder, had exhorted me to live in amity with my companions. I would beg Jaggs's pardon—aye, and Soda's. I would keep on the best terms with Tilgoe ; even set myself, perhaps, to assist him in his book. Should I, or should I not ? It was a low form of revenge, and he was a despicable personage. At any rate I would be friendly with him, since his conversation was instructive ; so I stood by his side behind the door as the prisoners were summoned one by one ; and as we listened to what was going on within, I was much entertained by the running comments of that peccant but plausible clergyman.

The governor was an awful autocrat, who was worth studying. Though mighty popular with his own acquaintances, who came and

bivouacked for a day or two, now and then, for the sake of fishing, and who, whilst imbibing his claret and sherry and munching his brown-bread biscuits, vowed that he was a prince among governors, it must be admitted that he was not beloved within the prison walls. He was a martinet; but that was nothing. All penal establishments must be worked with exact precision, or chaos would supervene. Most of our prison governors are martinets, and both prisoners and warders (old soldiers, for the most part, who are used to stern discipline) respect them none the less for it. But this particular governor—good fellow though he was—had unpleasant ways, and held objectionable theories. Prisoners and warders, he was wont to argue, belong to a class apart. They are predestined to be either prisoners or warders from the moment they come into existence, and are unfit for any other place in the world's economy. They are very deceitful, corrupt, *and must be watched*. That was the basis of his theory; and to the carrying out of it to its extreme limits, his time and health and energies were devoted. Belonging to two

branches of a common stock, prisoners and warders, to all intents and purposes, were to be treated alike. Their word was worth nothing, in his opinion. They had no idea of honour ; they must be governed with a whip. He was Van Amburgh in the den of beasts. All must be beaten and kicked into submission—some more, some less ; that was the only difference. Warders, for example, were rough bruins, who, if not properly watched and coerced, would hug you to death in no time ; convicts were tigers, feline panthers, jaguars—what not?—who needed more watching than the bruins, a few more lashes with the whip. As may be supposed, the warders, as a body, did not agree with this theory ; and they did not adore their governor. They were even misguided enough to hate him, and work against instead of with him. Sad to relate, they all declared that some day or other he would certainly go mad, and that it would be a good thing for all concerned when the fatal moment should arrive.

It did seem as though he would tease either himself or others into a lunatic asylum. He had little holes and crannies made

through which he could reconnoitre his men. If every cell was to have its regulation Judas-hole, so that you might see at any moment what every convict happened to be doing, why should not warders be served the same? If it was fitting for the jaguar to be stared at through a peep-hole, why not bruin? So the private peep-holes were without number, and he was constantly moving from one to another with a notion of dropping down upon somebody; and it never occurred to the zealous major that two can play at most games; that if he could make peep-holes to watch the warders, they could contrive similar orifices to watch him. And so it was. Walls have ears, they say; at Dartmoor they had eyes, in all kinds of unexpected places. When the major crossed a yard, with an elasticity of step borrowed from the happily still living Taglioni, his progress was signalled from point to point like that of her Majesty when travelling to Balmoral. He rarely caught his warders, somehow; for when he plunged into a workshop (once past the threshold he was no longer Taglioni, but a small round avalanche), his warders were standing at their

posts with hand to cap—models of discipline, veneered with an air of injured innocence, in that he should have flopped down on them without knocking. Sometimes this supreme excellence on the part of a leery race, bothered him, and he confided his suspicions to Mr. Scarraweg—the only one in the whole prison who had succeeded in winning his confidence. Discipline and the eagle eye of a despot will do much, but hardly so much as this. It was not natural. It was not, indeed. Mr. Scarraweg was bidden to look into the matter. He did, and the transcendental warders turned out to be mere men. They had overdone it, and, seeing their error, allowed themselves in future to be caught tripping, pennies being subscribed into a common fund for the payment of the necessary fines. This calmed the governor's perturbation. It had been an epidemic of goodness. As there are in prisons epidemics of a special kind of crime, why should there not be rare examples also of a run of goodness? Anyway, it was past, and the major became more vigilant than ever. He took to getting up two or three times a night, and perambulating the halls with list slippers and shivering legs.

There were two men at a time on night patrol. When the much-exercised warders became aware of this fresh nuisance, they arranged that one out of the two should undertake the duty and go to sleep and do anything else which was natural and to be expected, leaving the other (thus wasting one man's duty) to look out for the governor, and cough a timely warning.

So the major was worrying himself into the grave in his zeal, and his business was no better done than if he could have prevailed on himself to trust those who were about him ; not so well, indeed. He trusted Scarraweg certainly, who, save in small things of no moment, was never likely to deceive his superior.

The dapper little governor had taken his seat behind the adjudication-table, and had on his right side his clerk, who presented the 'penal record' of each prisoner as he took his place upon the footmarks painted on the boards ; on his left, Mr. Scarraweg, who flourished a book and a pencil, and made a grand pretence of taking notes. Behind and around the 'Swell' were ranged along the wall a perfect

museum of bits of iron, jagged pieces of ventilators, chisels, dinged pots, dinner-knives, stones tied up in handkerchiefs,—a gruesome arsenal of horrid weapons wherewith from time to time his valuable existence had been threatened. Now and then he glanced round for inspiration on his treasures (for he loved these things, and had been known to pet and polish them at stolen moments, when he thought nobody was looking), as though they were so many colours torn from a vanquished enemy. From time to time he glanced tenderly at them, as though saying to himself, as he twirled his white moustache, ‘Be stern, my heart! as stony as yon flint; as sharp and piercing as yon gimlet; as keen as yonder knife. These miscreants would take thy life—thy precious life, whereon depends the food of wife and babes! The spirit is willing, if the power be weak! Be mercilessly just. Heed not the outcry if the skilly be too thin; it is meet that the malefactor should be hungry. Turn a deaf ear to the complainings of Barabbas—the bed whereon he lieth should be adamant!’ It was a clever idea of his thus to enshrine himself. The background of abortive malice in

front of which he beamed was not without effect upon the prisoners. It gave him, in their eyes, a sort of aureole of invincibility, seeming to whisper to the malignant, 'Tear down ventilators, sharpen tin knives, heave pots or stones or bricks—they may not strike this man ; he bears a charmed life. 'Tis you only who will come to grief, since the CAT is the guerdon for assaults.' Thus many a feeble convict became yet more grovelling in the awful presence, whilst the judgments of the governor were erratic ; for his native kindness battled with an assumed truculence, and the fate of the victim depended more often than not as to whether the governor chanced to be looking at the trophies on the wall or at his blotting-pad.

On this particular morning he was like the weather, brisk and dry ; and having spied about through no less than six apertures since breakfast-time, and found nobody at fault, he strode into the adjudication-room, crying with a great bellow, as he rubbed his hands :

'Now, Mr. Scarraweg, sir ; look sharp. Time's of value, even here. To work, Mr. Scarraweg, sir. To work. To work !'

And then there was a grand scrimmage and rustling of feet, and the first prisoner upon the roll, pushed from behind, was sent stumbling down the steps. One warder poked him in the back in order that he should stand well at 'attention ;' another trod on his toes to force his feet upon the footmarks ; a third examined his hands to see if they concealed a brick ; a fourth rapped him on the knuckles, as a hint to keep his fingers to his sides ; while a fifth shouted, ' Eyes right ! ' and a sixth yelled in his ear, ' Now then, X 28, look alive ! What's your name ? '

No. 1 was scared and goggle-eyed, and counted the offensive weapons on the walls with mechanical alarm as a warder droned out with a stiff salute :

' Please sir, this here is an incorrigible man, sir—a sackmaker, an awful tiresome man, sir—who hides his sacks under his bed instead of putting them outside his cell. He wants to make an escape dress, I'm sure—a desperate scheming villain, if you please, sir.'

' What have you to say ? ' said the gover-

nor, removing his stern gaze from a lidless kettle with a jagged spout and no lid, to turn it on the incorrigible delinquent.

The prisoner raised his hand to assist his muddled wits, whereupon he received a rattat on the fingers and a thumb in the small of his back.

‘Answer!’ shouted somebody.

And he whined out, moved by despair to tears :

‘Oh, if you please, it’s so cold at night, and I use the sack as a counterpane—that’s all. Oh, pray forgive me. I’ll never——’

‘Silence!’ snapped the governor. ‘Forfeiture of marks! One day’s bread and water. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Cold, indeed! when you know that the question of ventilation and hot-air keeps the Home Office awake of nights! Ungrateful man! Be off—quick!’

‘Left turn—march!’ Scarraweg jerked out like the striking of a timepiece; for the chief warder always left his identity outside this room, and became a clock; and ticked the exploits of his chief in the harrying of the jaguar.

‘Left turn—quick march! Bring in the next!’ went the clock again.

It was Jaggs; who was too old a soldier to be hustled. He knew exactly how many steps it took to laud him gracefully upon those painted footmarks. If officious warders placed a hand on him, he had a peculiar way of wriggling out of their grasp, which was a respectful reproach for taking liberties. Nobody’s thumb found its way to the tender portions of the frame of Jaggs. He stood serene upon the footmarks, his nose well to the front, but his eyes leering with sidelong glance at his “uncle,” who (having left his private self on the door-mat without) returned the insolent smile with a sphinx-like glare.

The governor looked up and glowered.

The arsenal of horrors had no fears for this old reprobate, who, on catching the ‘speaker’s eye,’ glanced at his arm-badge, as if to refresh his memory, and rapped out glibly :

‘J. Jaggs—3rd conviction—L R Y 233—at your service.’

His accuser, this morning, was Mr. Scarraweg himself, who (and I was half-touched by his kindness) had determined to charge

his pseudo-nephew, and get him out of the way lest he should elect to expend his viciousness on me for my indignant protest yesterday.

‘Eating candles, sir, as usual,’ was the brief accusation.

‘Again!’ grumbled the major. ‘He doesn’t grow fat on them. This is one of the lean kine.’

‘I would crave to remark—if I may be permitted an observation,’ Jaggs said slowly, ‘that in the first place, I didn’t eat my candle; in the second, that the candle was my own, to eat or to read by, as I thought fit—but perhaps I misread the regulations; in the third, that I read by it instead of eating it; and that by chance I read an entertaining account—some books of travels are really quite amusing—of how the Esquimaux were in the habit——’

‘Never mind the Esquimaux!’ interrupted the governor, who was drawing pictures on his blotting-pad.

‘Quite so,’ acquiesced the ingenuous one; ‘they live a long way off, and are a bore;—but the same entertaining work reminded me

that when the Empress Catherine visited Berlin, her suite drank all the oil out of the lamps, and that then——'

'There, there! Be off!' the chief said, trying to repress a smile. 'Really these reports are sometimes just a little vexatious. Scarraweg, I wish you'd see to this!'

'Left turn—quick march!' ticked the chief warder, mildly.

It was bitter to him, even though he left his feelings outside, as a bather may leave his clothes upon the shore, that this 'bad lot' should be permitted to drive pins home into him and into his dog day after day, and, thanks to his airiness, escape so easily.

'Isn't he smart!' whispered to me the appreciative Tilgoe. 'He's thrown his life away, he has. He might have done wonders; though he's all, I fear, in one groove.'

I admitted that he was smart—too smart. And so was the Reverend Aurelius.

Then we relapsed into silence; for we could see all that passed, through the chink of the half-opened door: and I could perceive that my companion was taking mental notes on behalf of the prospective book.

The next upon the list was a tall, raw-boned fellow—a Scotch clerk, who was in for forgery. He was all of one colour—mustard colour, more or less diluted with dirt or water, as the case might be ; with a long neck, adorned with bumps, protruding from an ill-fitting coat, and long wrists like miniature necks, also adorned with bumps, sticking out from scanty sleeves. The only dark points about him were his eyes, and the broad-arrow marks daubed upon his clothing. His eyes were bleary and smeared, and out of shape ; surely they were big broad-arrow marks gone wrong. This man had a request to make—which he blurted out in the middle of his judgment. He thought it very hard not to be allowed to learn a trade. ‘Oakum sticks in my gizzard,’ he affirmed, ‘and prevents me from eating my dinner ; besides which, I’m growing silly.’

Now this, I thought, did seem a hard case—for it is bad for the mind to have no change of occupation—till the governor, tossing down his Penal Record, peevishly said :

‘So long as you are here, you’ll do oakum, or else baskets. You struck a fellow-prisoner at Portland. Do you think we’re going to

trust you with edged-tools ? Besides, if you did learn a trade you'd never practise it outside ; it's merely an excuse to escape hard-labour.'

Tilgoe, who through his chink was looking out for holes in the armour of the enemy, gave a grunt of discontent, for there was no denying that in many cases this was true ; but presently his eye beamed again, for I whispered in his ear :

'What is the good of learning trades when there's no means of getting employed on them outside !'

Down went the mental note. Then once more he was all attention, for at mention of edged-tools the chief's glance had wandered lovingly round the museum, and he met the gaze of the next man with the truculence of a wild boar at bay. It so chanced that the next man (who also dropped into his exact place on the footmarks, as if he had learnt only too well the ways of the establishment) was a notorious and hopeless humbug. A little pock-marked man, with a whining voice which rose abnormally towards the end of each sentence, and piped, squeak-

ing, into space ; a man whose grovelling yet aggressive manner would test the patience of an archangel.

This man, if charged with a petty offence, was always prepared with a counterbalancing avalanche of grievances ; and his manner was so serious that they could not be taken as insults. On this occasion, however, it would have been better to have held his tongue, for the chief had imbibed resolution from a cursory survey of his museum, as Antæus took in strength in the immortal wrestling-match, each time he touched Mother Earth.

‘I’ll thank ye to hear me, sir,’ he whined, ‘for I’m dreadful put upon. There are heaps of things, sir, as ’d ameliorate the lot of the pore prisoner.’

‘Take care!’ growled the warning of the governor, while Mr. Scarraweg turned up his right sleeve, and laid himself out for copious notes.

‘I’d like, sir, a little more air in my cell.’

‘A man just now,’ retorted the major, ‘was punished for secreting sacks, wherewith to keep out the draught.’

‘I’d like, sir, more humane treatment when

the Lord wills that I should go into horse-pital, and a softer bed when there ; or if your bowels of compassion don't stand to that much, I'd like to be moved into another and more salubrious climate.'

An ominous silence.

'It's woful dull, sir, here. Mightn't we have a band for the Sunday promenade, and pudding of a Thursday better warmed ? and oh, sir, it'd be the making of a many on us—it would indeed, for there's nothing like 'ope to keep a man straight—if we might look forrard to national fare at Christmas.'

Another silence, save for the tittering of the warders ; for the governor's brow was darkening (he objected to being chaffed by convicts), and he gnawed his white moustache, whilst staring at a pendant chisel, two rusted inches of which were daubed in blood.

'Anything more ?' he inquired, with sarcasm. 'You are before me for purloining soap.'

'Oh, don't, sir ! please don't !' responded this incorrigible, bursting into well-feigned tears. 'I did not steal it. I'd scorn the low action—I would indeed ! 'Taint prison soap, as you'd know if you cast your orb on it.

It was mother's soap—the last as she ever washed with!' Here he tried to impale his nose on the spikes in front of him, and snivelled before going on. And oh, please, sir, might I wear a band of crape over my arm-badge — say three inches wide — in memory of that departed saint?

Even Mr. Scarraweg smiled, though he was seasoned to this scoundrel's insolence, but the governor didn't. He bawled out in a fury :

'Three days of bread and water and dark cell—forfeiture of two hundred and forty marks!' and was left foaming long after the wretch was gone.

As he passed, Tilgoe reproved him (for our turn was coming soon, and it was not well to confront the governor when thoroughly upset), but all the reply he made was with a shrug of the shoulder, whilst he muttered laconically between his teeth :

'Never no 'arm arxin', 'cos arxin' breaks no bones, and you might git.'

'Those are the persons,' my reverend ally whispered, 'who are responsible for all the badgering. Between you and me, you know,

warders and others are human, and have feelings which are rubbed up by chaps like that, whose only pleasure is to create a row. They aggravate the officials out of pure mischief, till they don't know what they're doing, and then, of course, they come down with a whack upon those who wince most—upon you and me, for example, who are gentlemen. We all know, as men of the world, that there are heaps of cantankerous people outside, who, from sheer contrariness and hatred of their brother man, do their best to annoy their neighbours. How much the more, then, must we expect convicts to give way to such ignoble eccentricities, considering that such brains as they possess are in a constant state of ferment! That's an excuse for the convict, and, by reflection, an excuse for the warder too.'

'You will put that in your book, of course,' I suggested slyly.

The Reverend Aurelius grinned and showed his teeth with a little private gurgle.

'Hush!' he answered. 'Mark the result of the last miscreant's mischief. This little fellow will catch it hot.'

A man of extremely low stature, with a white crop and a singular face fretted with cross-lines by temper, shambled into the room, his fingers and his lips twitching with excitement, which he could not suppress, and which procured for him many raps and pushes.

‘This man, please your honour,’ droned out the accuser, ‘is a shocking lot. Impudent, tiresome, insolent, and don’t do no work, neither.’

‘You’re a liar!’ cried the excited little man.

‘There, sir! ’Ark to that!’ groaned the accuser; ‘and afore yer honour, too!’

‘Oh, don’t mind him!’ urged the tiny man, whose puckered face did not reach to the spear-head level, but appeared in segments on either side of a thick bar. ‘I am that worn by ’im that my life ain’t my own!’

‘I am aware of that,’ retorted the major. ‘You are the chattel of her Majesty the Queen, and your duty is to say nothing, but obey orders.’

‘But, sir,’ pleaded the suppliant, ‘I’m sixty-five years old, and was always a shoe-

maker by trade, and take a pride in my work, and always did, and never scamped it, leastways except when I was drunk, which I've no chance of here, worse luck! for it might help me to forget my misery! And this blackguard—well, I can't help it; you may flog me if you like—this beast tells me I don't know how to close a boot. He does, upon my oath! Not close a boot! As if he could understand my business better nor I do myself—the filthy 'edge'og! The man 'ates and ab'ors me, sir. I've bin under him afore, and writhed, and was removed from him by the mercy of Gôd. That was at Portsmouth, in my last lagging; and here we air again! It's awful. If you don't take me away from 'im I'll destroy myself. I will indeed! Life ain't worth 'avin', nohow! Not close a boot!

'If you suffered so much before, why affront a second sentence?' was the cogent inquiry of the governor.

'Oh, I can't tell!' cried the wretched man, rubbing his grimy face against the bars. "'Cause I warn't good enough to die, I s'pose! But if this is to go on I won't live

no more, and you and 'e'll 'ave my gore upon your 'eads, you will !'

'Three days bread and water!' retorted the martinet sternly, while Scarraweg ticked feebly, for he knew that the grievance was a real one; and the hapless cobbler was removed struggling, swearing that life warn't worth living nohow, and begging they would kindly kill him off at once.

'What will he do?' I whispered, while cries of 'Not close a boot!' echoed fainter and more fainter along the hall.

'It's my turn now,' he whispered. 'What a nuisance that the old devil's back's up! Never mind. Watch how I add my faggot to the heap.'

With a calm assurance which compelled respect—the genuine pride which clothes itself in the garb of humbleness—the Reverend Aurelius Tilgoe stepped slowly to his place upon the footmarks. His air of long-suffering celestial innocence, tempered with mundane reproach, was a masterpiece. He swept the museum with a look of loathing, then turned two eyes upon the governor, which swam with tears of commiseration, as if he would

say, were one so meek to permit himself to moralize: 'Oh, what a globe is this, that a hair of that venerable head should ever have been imperilled by the wicked!'

The good major could not meet that commiserating glance, for it is not pleasant to be pitied by felons; so he modestly sketched ballet-girls upon his blotting-pad, saying in mild reproof, as the sylphs grew under his pen:

'I am surprised to see *you* here, Tilgoe; *you*, to whom I am accustomed to look for the setting of a good example! Owing to consistent good-behaviour, you have earned special privileges. You seem to be truly repentant and sorry for the past. It is a black and wicked past!' (Here the major put finishing touches to a lady in scanty raiment.) 'But I regret to read in your penal record that this is your second report within six months. You were then fined marks which I had hoped ere this to have been able to restore. I trust that, instead of helping others, you are not falling away yourself. Let me see. Your last report was for talking in church—shameful!'

‘Oh no, sir! if I may venture to contradict,’ hastily replied the clergyman. ‘I was wrong, I know, but my feelings carried me away. The late chaplain and I were constantly engaged in polemical discussions. Though I have sinned—sinned grievously—yet am I of the Church; and his doctrines were lax, wofully lax! He was a worthy man, but we could never agree!’

‘Because he saw through you,’ Scarraweg muttered; then broke into an apologetic cough.

‘His discourses were heterodox, and, impelled by impulse, I rudely interrupted him one Sunday in his sermon, for which he had me reported. It was very hard, sir, but only what I deserved, I know. I have strained every nerve since then to please you, and almost hoped I had succeeded. Anyway, your kindness I never, never shall forget, nor that of these good gentlemen who serve you so faithfully. Of what am I accused now?’

Here his voice faltered, and the blood of me, the listener, ran cold. What a snake in the grass was this, that could so deftly

assume the disguise of repentant sorrow! And what did the governor mean by declaring that his past had been black and wicked? Then the story of the one slip and the unlucky bit of paper really was a lie? Verily, all convicts were hopeless liars; and I felt a wild inclination to become Soda's bosom friend, who, at least, made no pretence to be aught but a child of Belial.

But while he spoke I could not withdraw my attention from the evolutions of this snake, and turned again to listen.

'Of what are you accused?—of having a lead pencil found in your cell. What could you want a pencil for? How did you get it? Your slate pencil is enough for you.'

Tilgoe tapped his white forehead abstractedly, then answered in trembling accents of relief:

'To be sure, I do remember! My poor head swims so at times that it's pretty certain to land me in a false position. It was my duty two days back, I recollect, to remove the forms after evening school, and I found it on a desk where, doubtless, the schoolmaster had left it; and I really get so

confused that I must have forgotten to give it to him.'

'There's a picture missing from the illustrated library book upon his shelf,' observed Mr. Scarraweg, in an undertone.

'Can you swear that *I* disfigured the volume?' demanded Tilgoe, with hauteur.

'No, that I can't,' grunted the principal warder; 'though I have my suspicions. So, not wishing to make you out a greater liar than you are, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt.'

'I am only a poor prisoner, I know too well—salt that has lost its savour,' began the lowly Tilgoe.

'Silence!' interrupted the governor, doubtfully. 'Don't make mistakes again. You came here with a bad reputation by reason of your crime, or rather crimes, for there were a dozen charges, at least, against you, though only one was investigated.'

'Cannot you spare me, sir?' he murmured.

(And this, thought I, is the honourable gentleman who has made one tiny slip!)

'Yet your conduct here,' pursued the governor, 'is exemplary. Go now, and be

more careful, for I should be sorry to think you had relapsed.'

The Reverend Aurelius bowed and hesitated; then said in crushed accents of contrition:

'I trust not, sir. Indeed, I trust not. But, though I cannot complain of anyone in a place where I am treated so much beyond my deserts, without a pang, yet I would like you to know that I have been deprived of spiritual consolation for six whole weeks!'

'Did you put your name down for the chaplain?' inquired the major.

'Yes, sir. I have sent for him many times, but he has taken no notice of my petition. I need spiritual help—none more, though one of the cloth, and I'm proud to say it; and if you would only be so kind as to intercede——'

'Mr. Scarraweg, how's this, sir?' demanded the governor, whose white moustaches bristled. 'I know you don't like this prisoner. It is shameful to show favouritism among convicts—shameful, sir! Why should he not be consoled? Did you put his name down for the chaplain?'

‘That I did!’ clicked the blunt chief warden with emphasis, as if he was striking the hour; ‘and his reverence said that he wouldn’t visit this man unless he promised to apologise, for on his last visit he swore and used obscene language.’

‘Oh, sir!’ murmured the suppliant, in tones torn by suppressed emotion. ‘Don’t believe it. The chaplain’s Christian charity is unhinged because I called him heterodox. I was wrong to use the word, for it wasn’t civil—but it certainly was not obscene!’

‘Well, well, you may go, and I will inquire into this myself. Call the next prisoner!’ cried the governor testily, for in his holy of holies he thought that chaplains in the abstract would also be improved by coercion.

Tilgoe was bent in shame, and could scarcely stagger away. He was absorbed by an overmastering conviction of moral failure. His cheek blushed as though he had a notion that shortcomings were as indecent as short petticoats. So much absorbed was he, either by his emotion or his acting, that he did not look at me as he went by. And I was glad of it, for I could not command my counte-

nance. No more did he (when the need for the histrionic art was past), for no sooner had he departed from 'the presence' than an evil scowl took the place of subdued emotion—a scowl wherein craft and hate were molten into one; and as he walked he muttered appalling threats of future vengeance under his breath, varied by a shower of curses upon the too sagacious Scarraweg.

END OF VOL. I.

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